

Intercity Bus 2019 RFP Pre-Bid Meeting

Hocking Athens Perry Community Action (HAPCAP), Main Office
June 27th, 2019, 11:00A.M. EST

Present:

Carolyn Conley, HAPCAP
Claudia Bashaw, HAPCAP
Alex Ewers, ODOT
Gary Becker, Dinsmore & Shohl
Pam Baramidze, Urban Express
Garth McLinton, Urban Express
Kim Hansen, Lakefront Lines
John Crowell, Crowell VIP Motorcoach Services
John Goebel, Barons Bus
Tom Goebel, Barons Bus
Reginald Addy, Miller Transportation (via phone)

Ms. Bashaw called the meeting to order, welcomed participants and began introductions.

Ms. Conley gave an overview of Ohio's 5311(f) program and an overview of the programs at HAPCAP, including Transportation.

Review of Timeline (Ms. Bashaw):

Ms. Bashaw reviewed the Timeline included in the Agenda (see attachment)
She also opened the floor to any questions regarding the Timeline. No questions were asked

Explanation of RIBAC:

Ms. Conley provided a brief explanation of the Rural Intercity Bus Advisory Committee (RIBAC) which is mentioned several times in the RFP. The Committee was created after the previous RFP in 2014, and serves as a sounding board for decisions made about the GoBus program. This committee is made up of a variety of transportation stakeholders from around the state, including representatives from ODOT as well as transportation providers.

Ms. Bashaw explained that Mr. Ewers acts as GoBus' liaison with RIBAC.

Current GoBus Routes:

Ms. Bashaw provided an overview of the current GoBus routes, all of which operate seven day a week, 365 days per year. The current service is what GoBus will move forward with with this RFP. Route A provides roundtrip service 3 times daily in both directions and Route B provides roundtrip service twice a day in both directions. In 2015, the State Intercity Needs Assessment indicated that the GoBus service should expand and Routes C, D & E were added. These three routes travel roundtrip once per day in each direction.

Current Operating Budget:

Ms. Bashaw reviewed the current Operating Budget for 2019 (the current contract, including the budget) is available on our website's RFP page—ridegobus.com/rfp).

Ms. Bashaw opens the floor up to questions regarding the budget.

Participant 1: Is the In-Kind Match included on the top side?

Ms. Bashaw: Yes.

Participant 1: The third-party provider does the other TPA stuff, the ticketing, etc.?

Ms. Bashaw: Yes.

Participant 1: If you took the Greyhound piece out, off the \$9 million, then that would tell you what the service provider's receiving?

Ms. Bashaw: Yes, so taking the In-Kind Match as well as the Farebox Revenue out of the equation, then yes, that is the number you would want to work off of.

Participant 1: Would you then be able to divide that number by the mileage numbers since you're asking for pricing based on mileage?

Ms. Bashaw: Yes.

Participant 1: These numbers just don't include the Administrative side.

Ms. Bashaw: Yes, this is Operations only.

Ms. Conley: Right. We have two separate grants, the Operations grant and the Administration grant and the numbers presented are only those pertaining to the Operating side.

Participant 1: Can you expand or contract service or miles during the contract period as long as you base the costs off of the original numbers?

Ms. Conley: In general, yes, if we decide to move ahead using a Cost per Mile reimbursement process. Currently we are working with a Cost Reimbursement process and your thought would not hold true in that scenario. Also, to expand or change service, we work very closely with ODOT to make sure that such expansions are affordable and meets the needs intended by the program.

Participant 2: If you were to reduce service, would it work the same way?

Ms. Conley: Yes.

Mr. Ewers: I wouldn't anticipate many changes overall. All the current services laid out in the RFP are indicative of service we are looking for.

Ms. Bashaw: GoBus service changes are directed by a couple of things, the Needs Assessment (link available on the website ridegobus.com/rfp) being one of the major factors in whether or not our service expands or contracts. In short, we don't make those changes without a fairly involved process which includes the RIBAC in addition to ODOT.

Ms. Conley goes over the website page specific to the GoBus RFP and what people may find there in the way of reference materials as well as the RFP Application, etc.

Ms. Bashaw briefly describes more about the Intercity Needs Assessment and its role in directing the GoBus program and RFP process.

Ms. Bashaw reviews HAPCAP's expectations for the RFP:

Pay close attention to the Timeline deadlines

Questions are encouraged

References part of RFP Application

Part 1, Sections H & I

Cost Proposal Summary Worksheets—providing both Cost Reimbursement and Cost per Mile for each Route bidding on

Submission instructions

Page 10 and 49 of RFP Application

Mr. Becker reviews the requirement for vendors to provide 3-year and 1-year proposals:

Pertains to all routes EXCEPT for the Route D Wooster (Rural)
Wooster Rural will be a 1-year proposal ONLY, in anticipation of future changes to this route
Reminder to include how extraordinary circumstances would be handled—EG, unexpected maintenance issues, etc.

Ms. Bashaw opens the floor up to questions:

Participant 1: Given the peak times of Friday and Sunday it seems as if GoBus is catering to OU students by adding on buses to serve the demand for travel on those days from and to OU. Do you see this as a burden?

Ms. Bashaw: To see it as a burden is a bit subjective considering our mission is to provide the general public in rural areas with transportation options, regardless of who they are. We don't view OU students as a burden, but rather as part of our normal general ridership.

Mr. Ewers: One of the main goals of the Rural Intercity Bus program specifically is to connect rural areas with urban centers, so to specifically connect areas where there's large concentrations of people in rural areas that want to get to places like Cincinnati and Columbus and Cleveland to connect with the larger intercity bus network between urban areas. The way the GoBus system is set up now it works to fill in the gaps where other existing intercity bus service is lacking, and therefore provide service to as many people as possible that don't have access to the other intercity bus routes so that they can make those larger connections.

Participant 1: Would you want to see alternative proposals on how to manage this, or is this just the way it is and it's fine.

Mr. Ewers: I think the level of service is where we want it to be now.

Ms. Conley: Ohio University by just happenstance is one of the largest universities in a very rural area of the state. That's just who they are.

Mr. Ewers: Other major universities are in urban areas so we don't need to connect them to urban areas because they are already right there and have access to other intercity bus networks.

Whereas OU is large and in a rural area which is unusual. So we get a lot of traffic that way but we're still working to the mission of the program as a whole.

Participant 1: So mechanically you list the requirements on the equipment when it talks about the additional equipment. Are there specific requirements listed somewhere for the everyday equipment? Do you require the everyday equipment to be new or should they fall under the same requirements as listed for the additional equipment?

Ms. Bashaw: I believe the intent is for all equipment to fall under those parameters.

Participant 1: Would that then be at the start of the contract or the end? Can you start the contract with a seven-year-old bus for instance? Or do you always have to have a bus less than seven years old?

Ms. Conley: Our goal was to always have a bus less than seven years old. As buses age the maintenance costs go up and reliability starts to be an issue. So it is definitely our goal to have a newer fleet on the road, so when you are doing your budgets assume that this is our goal.

Participant 1: Would you consider a body-on-chassis vehicle for this service?

Ms. Conley: We may have to look into that a bit more. There are some routes where a smaller vehicle could work.

Mr. Becker: This is a specific question, and it would be good to have that in writing so that we can give some thought to it and publish it for all interested parties.

Participant 3: A follow-up vehicle question, all vehicles have to be ADA accessible right?

Ms. Bashaw: Yes.

Mr. Ewers: Yes.

Participant 1: When you say in the application that it is required or strongly preferred that there is a operations staff member devoted to GoBus, does that mean one person or can those duties be parceled out to several people?

Ms. Bashaw: Having several people to help with GoBus is something we are willing to entertain even though our preference currently is to have one. It comes down to a communication issue. As long as communication protocols are established from the onset, then having multiple people on should not pose a problem. We also realize that different vendors have different capacities. The point is that we're able to communicate freely and promptly and that our office has a point of contact to help us troubleshoot any issues immediately.

Mr. Becker: In light of past experience, the preference is that each provider needs to have a contact person available for the GoBus program specifically.

Participant 4: I have a question about scoring. In looking at the criteria, it seems as if the current provider would get more points because they have a better understanding of the current service than anyone else. How do each of those subsections weigh into the assessment of each criterion? How much weight goes into the Marketing section?

Mr. Becker: All I can say on that is that the qualifications and the point system that's listed, starting on page 60, talks about a service provider's experience providing similar types of service. Our hope is that service providers that responds demonstrate how they have provided similar types of service to the GoBus even though they may not have worked on a GoBus route before. We're looking for someone who has experience providing this type of service, not specifically GoBus service. We tried to draft this in such a way that nobody gets an advantage coming in.

Ms. Bashaw: I think that is why we listed Experience as a subsection of a larger scoring criterion along with two others that play into that thirty-five points because we do realize people have lots of different experiences and resources and we want to get a good picture of the vendor's capabilities when it comes to providing 5311-type service.

Participant 4: When a passenger wants to use GoBus but also go beyond GoBus routes, how does that person make that trip?

Ms. Bashaw: Currently, our website only offers ticketing for GoBus routes. For larger regional or national travel we direct passengers to other carriers' websites where they can find not only the GoBus portion of their trip but the rest of their trip as well and can purchase their whole trip in one transaction. We just want to get people where they want to go and so we just try to help them make the ticketing purchasing process as easy as possible which means that currently for regional and national travel we direct them elsewhere.

Ms. Conley: Greyhound also has a handful of GoBus tickets that they sell on our behalf. So if someone is trying to go from Nelsonville to New York City for instance, we will talk to them, try to educate them on we work with Greyhound, and then direct them to either the Greyhound website or customer service phone number. We're part of the interlining network as well as having our own ticketing platform on the website as well.

Participant 1: Does the service provider do all of the customer service?

Ms. Bashaw: We have a toll-free number and we are the front lines for customer service which is our preference.

Participant 1: So you provide customer service Monday through Friday?

Ms. Bashaw: Yes, and then we have an after-hours call service which handles calls from 4pm until 7:59am the next morning.

Participant 1: So when it's after hours, is someone on-call?

Ms. Bashaw: Yes, and that's the service provider that comes in at that point for emergencies only and we work with the after-hours to really define what that is. We receive email communications from them regarding any calls from the night before.

Ms. Conley: To clarify further, the after-hours service is an additional third-party contractor and not the service provider. They are part of a larger call center which handles a variety of calls including GoBus. They have a limited scope of what they can answer.

Participant 1: Do the customers have access to find out where the bus?

Ms. Bashaw: Yes, there is a bus tracker. We also have a travel alerts page on our website.

Participant 1: Do you have to pre-buy a ticket?

Ms. Bashaw: No you don't. We do allow cash purchases, but it is a first-come, first-served basis.

Participant 1: How do you anticipate adding on a section for a busy Friday for instance?

Ms. Bashaw: We work with the service provider and check on our seat availability at different points during the week leading up to that Friday and make our best guess on when to add an additional bus for a particular schedule. We do also keep an eye on travel trends like for the Thanksgiving holiday. Over the past several years we've been consistently busy several days before and so we know that we can safely add on extra buses for particular schedules and they will fill up.

Ms. Conley: Any questions discussed here and any we receive in the future we will compile and send out to everyone. We will be making the questions and the answers available.

Participant 1: So everyone will receive all of the questions and all of the answers?

Ms. Bashaw: Yes.

Closing comments: Ms. Bashaw & Mr. Becker

Ms. Bashaw: I will confirm receipt of any questions or requested clarifications I receive prior to the July 11th, 4PM EST deadline.

Mr. Becker: Any questions you have after that deadline should come to me because that way we can help control the communication of information.

Ms. Bashaw: We will make sure Gary's information is readily available.

Participant 5: Same process for the questions you receive Gary? They'll go out to everyone?

Mr. Becker: Yes, that's correct

Ms. Bashaw: Thank you everyone for joining us today. We appreciate your interest.