

Subtask 2.1. Railroad Operating Plan and Operating Budget

Requirement

The contractor will review and comment on the GLCRR operations plan provided to establish sustainable commuter passenger service in this corridor. Review should also include visual inspection of rail infrastructure and equipment. GLCRR will furnish the equipment and pilot necessary to complete visual inspection at no cost to contractor. Observations of operations personnel's ability to meet all safety, contemporary standards required to operate passenger service and with special attention to assure ADA compliance will also be provided by the contractor.

The contractor shall review the operations issues including but not limited to locomotive maintenance, fueling and any other pertinent details including schedule of cleaning and maintenance of the coaches needs and comment on whether they meet appropriate standards.

The contractor shall review the anticipated mechanism(s) to provide service that can accommodate all passengers with handicaps.

Discussion

Operating Plan

RLBA has reviewed commuter rail operating plan contained in the document "AA Transit" prepared by GLC. That plan contains many valid concepts which are incorporated in the following operating plan.

Concept

The rail route is 26.9 miles in length one way, between Howell and a station at Plymouth Road in Ann Arbor. An extension of another 2.86 miles between the Plymouth Road Station and a station near the University of Michigan stadium is a possibility. Four train sets initially would provide four morning and four evening trips each weekday. Trains will be operated in push-pull fashion. The passenger coaches will be pushed by a locomotive, but controlled by a cab car on the southbound move and pulled by the locomotive on northbound movement, eliminating the need to change the position of the locomotive on opposite direction trips. This is a conventional and efficient practice, employed nationwide.

Stations

Station locations under consideration include Howell, Chilson, Hamburg, Whitmore Lake, and Plymouth Road in Ann Arbor. Also under consideration is a

possible extension to the University of Michigan stadium with a potential downtown Ann Arbor stop. Stations are described in the next section of this report and the extension is addressed later.

A proof-of-purchase fare system is recommended for Wally service; such systems have been adopted in almost all recent commuter rail implementations. It is recommended that ticket vending machines (TVM) located at each station accept credit cards. Ticket validators (to “punch” individual and ten-trip tickets) would be located on platforms. No cash sales would be made at stations or on trains. If desired, cash ticket sales could be offered at the Wally office and perhaps at selected retailers.

The Wally service would accommodate disabled passengers, as discussed in following sections concerning stations and equipment.

Train Operations

The proposed Wally operating plan is based upon the concept that the service must be both convenient and automobile-competitive in terms of transit time. In order to do so, a maximum operating speed of 60 mph is prescribed on GLC track. There is one curve which will require reduced speed as will the CSX crossing at Ann Pere, which is south of the Lucy Road Park, near Howell. The Ann Pere crossing signal could be upgraded from an automatic (first come-first served) basis to one controlled by a dispatcher. The Wally Service should seek an agreement with CSX for commuter train priority at the crossing.

Experience indicates that allowing one minute of dwell time at stations is appropriate until actual experience dictates otherwise. If service is extended beyond Plymouth Road, that station probably would require a longer dwell time, two minutes initially, to accommodate the significant expected number of passengers loading/unloading at that point. A sample schedule is shown below.

Sample Train Schedule

Station	Morning Inbound Trains			
Howell	6:00 AM	6:30 AM	7:00 AM	7:30 AM
Chilson	6:09 AM	6:39 AM	7:09 AM	7:39 AM
Hamburg	6:20 AM	6:50 AM	7:20 AM	7:50 AM
Whitmore Lake	6:24 AM	6:54 AM	7:24 AM	7:54 AM
Ann Arbor Plymouth Rd	6:36 AM	7:06 AM	7:36 AM	8:06 AM
Ann Arbor downtown	6:44 AM	7:14 AM	7:44 AM	8:14 AM
Ann Arbor U of M Stadium	6:52 AM	7:22 AM	7:52 AM	8:22 AM

Station	Evening Outbound Trains			
Ann Arbor U of M Stadium	4:30 PM	5:00 PM	5:30 PM	6:00 PM

Ann Arbor downtown	4:37 PM	5:07 PM	5:37 PM	6:07 PM
Ann Arbor Plymouth Rd	4:45 PM	5:15 PM	5:45 PM	6:15 PM
Whitmore Lake	4:57 PM	5:27 PM	5:57 PM	6:27 PM
Hamburg	5:01 PM	5:31 PM	6:01 PM	6:31 PM
Chilson	5:12 PM	5:42 PM	6:12 PM	6:42 PM
Howell	5:22 PM	5:52 PM	6:22 PM	6:52 PM

GLC is willing to perform freight service at night in order to make tracks available to commuter rail trains during daytime. GLC notes that the freight interchange with AARR has been performed at night in the past without difficulty. AARR has expressed some concerns about that plan. If night freight service does not work out, RLBA believes freight service could be performed between morning and evening commuter trains based on the initial commuter schedule. Improvements needed at Osmer to support daytime freight operations are addressed below under infrastructure.

Train Crews

Crews would consist of two persons, a conductor and an engineer. Crews would report for duty in the morning at the night layover facility at Oak Grove. Each crew would move its trainset to the Howell station for boarding and departure at the scheduled time. Upon the completion of the inbound trip, each trainset would be pulled south of the Plymouth Road station onto AARR track. The trainsets would be coupled into a single train and moved as one to the daytime layover track to be built at Osmer. Crews would remain on board to Osmer and then be transported via highway to the Oak Grove reporting/rest facility, and according to GLC, “the train crews will be released upon tie up at mid-day for at least four hours in order to return for evening service.” This would be in compliance with the Federal hours of service laws governing railroad operating employees.

Crews would report back on duty for evening service at the Oak Grove facility and be transported via highway to the daytime layover point. All four trainsets would be moved as one train to Plymouth Road and staged south of the station on AARR track. Each crew would uncouple its trainset and move it to the station for boarding and departure. Upon reaching Howell, each empty train would be moved individually to the Oak Grove layover facility where crews would go off duty. Trainsets would be cleaned and serviced as needed at night at Oak Grove.

On-board crew duties would include all aspects of passenger interface – inspecting fares, assisting passengers, handling doors and ADA access equipment, answering questions, walk-through collection of papers and trash after each run.

Equipment

Federated Railways (FRY) has procured 51 Budd-built commuter rail cars previously used in Metra's Chicago area commuter service. An appropriate number of cab control and coach cars will be leased to the Wally service.

GLC or FRY is expected to acquire and lease to the Wally service five locomotives to operate four trainsets and provide one spare.

On May 29, 2008, two commuter rail passenger cars were inspected at the GLC's Owasso, Michigan yard. Don Gezon of RLBA met with Mr. James Schell, Vice President and Chief Mechanical Officer of GLC and examined the cars.

The cars (two 1950 Budd built coaches, subsequently rebuilt in 1973-4) were available for inspection. Car 720 is a standard bi-level coach and the 790 is a cab-coach. The cab-coach is equipped with an operator's cab for push-pull operation. Based on discussions with Mr. Schell, it is accepted that both cars are acceptable for service meeting all pertinent mechanical/electrical regulation requirements. While collision posts are not present, the cab cars are grandfathered, having been rebuilt in 1973-4. The cars are in good condition with no obvious mechanical or cosmetic defects. They are equipped with head-end 480 volt, 3-phase electrical power, and with train lines for electrical supply and locomotive control. Some modification of the existing door controls will be required, but is not a major concern.

The one problem that will need to be overcome is how to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Boarding and exiting the cars requires using four steps as presently configured. It is likely that mechanical lifts at each station would provide means of complying with the regulation. Circulation between cars by wheel chair is not possible because the bi-level cars have raised thresholds between cars.

Infrastructure

RLBA inspected the corridor by means of a hi-rail trip hosted by GLC on May 2, 2008. Findings of that inspection are presented in Task 2.3. Infrastructure requirements summarized below are based upon planned operations, discussions with GLC, observations made during the inspection and infrastructure analysis in Task 2.3.

Based on one-way peak period service and night freight operations, no new sidings are needed for train meets. Expanding service or implementing two-way peak period service would create the need for sidings where one commuter train can pass another going in the opposite direction. Farther in the future, expanded service hours or changes in freight operations conceivably could cause concurrent freight and passenger operations with a resulting need for additional sidings or other infrastructure.

Although the existing Osmer siding would seem to be available for daytime commuter train storage based upon GLC-AARR interchange being conducted at night, it would be prudent to construct a new daytime commuter train storage siding at Osmer. This would leave the existing siding available for interchange and freight use. Extending the existing siding to accommodate 90-car trains could be done at the same time to improve freight efficiency and facilitate shared use.

Overnight Layover Facility

The proposed location of the overnight layover facility is Oak Grove siding, north of Howell. While earlier planning may have considered a “bare bones” approach based upon parking commuter trains overnight on the existing siding, RLBA believes that a proper layover yard should be constructed to facilitate cleaning, servicing, security and perhaps light maintenance. The layover yard/plan should provide for cleaning, servicing, an access road between tracks to facilitate cleaning and servicing, standby power, fencing, a building for crew reporting and rest facilities, and utilities.

Midday Storage Facility

After unloading passengers, each trainset will pull onto AARR trackage south of the Plymouth Road station. (RLBA understands that GLC and AARR have had preliminary discussions concerning this concept.) When all four trainsets are empty, they will be coupled together and the last inbound crew will move them together to the daytime layover track at Osmer (or Whitmore Lake if Osmer is not available) for day storage. Crew members could walk through and pickup trash there or at Plymouth Road. The first outbound crew would move all trainsets from Osmer to AARR track south of the Plymouth Road Station. Each trainset would be moved north to the station for boarding at the appropriate time.

Signal System

RLBA recommends that a signal system be installed on the trackage to be used by the Wally service. RLBA has made the same recommendation to its prior commuter rail clients, and almost all new services have been implemented on signaled trackage. Signal system alternatives and costs are discussed in Task 2.3.

Next Steps and Critical Path – Rail Operations

The next step with respect to commuter operations is to negotiate access and operating terms with GLC. In many new starts, particularly those involving larger railroads, these topics have been the subject of separate agreements because the host railroad often does not want to be the commuter service operator. In that model, the service sponsor negotiates an access agreement with the host

railroad and then initiates a competitive procurement to select a commuter rail operator. The access agreement also opens the door for the commuter rail service sponsor to construct improvements such as stations on railroad property and to initiate track improvements whether performed by the host railroad or by a contractor with the host railroad's concurrence.

The Wally situation is different since GLC is offering to be the host railroad and the commuter service operator, and it is logical to implement service with GLC fulfilling both roles. The Wally Coalition could enter into an agreement that combines access and operations or could seek to develop a two-part agreement that separates the two in a way such that the service could be operated by another party at some future time either at the option of the Wally Coalition or upon mutual agreement of the Wally Coalition and GLC.

In either event, as soon as a decision is made to implement the service, access and operating negotiations should commence so that GLC can participate in service development and so that construction activities and track improvements may commence. RLBA understands that GLC must have the State's approval to operate passenger service, so both the Wally Coalition and GLC should continue their dialog with MDOT so that the needed approval is forthcoming on a timely basis.

Operating Budget

RLBA's review of the proposed Operating Budget is incorporated in the Task 3 Funding section of this report.

Conclusion

GLC's interest in hosting and operating commuter service is a great boost toward service implementation. The desired service can be provided in the corridor, subject to station issues described elsewhere. Nonetheless, many details remain to be worked out between the service sponsor and the railroad, including rights, responsibilities and compensation. These items should be resolved promptly to permit starting work on physical preparations for service, such as track improvements, station development and equipment modifications and procurement (locomotives).