

Public Hearing
Public Transportation
May 12, 2008

The Public Hearing to seek comments regarding Tioga County Public Transportation, including the recently awarded 5311 Federal Capital Monies and the upcoming procurement process for Public Transportation Services for Tioga County for the period of January 1, 2009 through December 31, 2011 was called to order by the Chair at 7:01 p.m. All Legislative members were present.

There were approximately 74 people in attendance.

The Clerk read the legal notice as published in the official newspapers.

Chair Weston spoke. "Good evening everyone, my name is Dale Weston and I am the Chair of the Tioga County Legislature. I and my colleagues would like to welcome you to the Edward Hubbard Auditorium.

"At this time the Tioga County Legislature is conducting a public hearing to seek comments regarding Tioga County public transportation. This includes the recently award 5311 Federal Capital monies. It also includes the upcoming procurement process for public transportation services for the period January 1, 2009 through December 31, 2011.

"Notice of this hearing was published in the Morning Times and the Tioga County Courier.

"This public hearing is for the public to give comments to the County prior to making its decision. This is not a question and answer period. Before turning the meeting over to Shawn Yetter, Commissioner of Social Services, there a few rules of conduct that we must adhere to:

"Number one, if you wish to speak, please print and sign your name on the register located on the desk to my left. For those of you who have not done so you may go over there and do that. When your name is called, please come to the front of the room and state your name for the record prior to giving your comment.

"If you represent an organization, please give the name of the organization. Each organization is limited to two speakers. Each speaker will be allotted up to five minutes for comment. I iterate, the purpose of this hearing is to receive comments from the public, this is not a question and answer period. If there is anyone that has not signed up on one of these sheets that wants to get signed up rather than disrupt the meeting, you should go over and do that and we will wait for you for a moment.

“Before we continue I would like to remind you that the minutes are being taken of the meeting. The minutes are complete transcripts of what you are saying. This will enable us to have a better idea and not to miss anything during the meeting, and will give us an opportunity to read these over before we make a decision. At this time I would like to turn the meeting over to Commissioner Yetter.”

“Shawn Yetter, Commissioner of Social Services, spoke. “Good evening. The last time we had a hearing on public transportation it was three years ago and four people came so I am pleased that after having gone to the Legislature and asking them that it was time to hold a public hearing on transportation issues in the County that they very quickly agreed to that, and the turnout tonight definitely indicates that that was the right decision to do. What I am going to do is a very brief overview, which there is a handout that provides the exact things I am going to be talking about available to you. which hopefully you all have copies of, and I will try to do this very quickly because as Chairman Weston indicated the purpose of tonight is to hear from you and to understand clearly what your needs as citizens of Tioga County are in regards to improving the public transportation system in Tioga County.

“Just quickly a historical view on the system, it is a system that was created in 1991 and it is a coordinated system that provides both public transportation and nonemergency Medicaid transportation. Nonemergency Medicaid transportation is a service that is mandated by the State of New York for individuals in receipt of Medicaid who do not have other access to transportation that our Department, the Department of Social Services, must provide service to. That is really the nexus of why I the Commissioner of Social Services am standing up here before you talking about public transportation and Medicaid transportation because there is such a strong link between that it was kind of just put in DSS and that is where it has remained.

“The New York State Department of Health and the New York State Department of Transportation establish and approve the funding mechanisms for this system. There was recognition across the State at that time in the early 90s that Medicaid transportation costs were escalating significantly. Most counties, like Tioga, were using a lot of cab service. It was extremely costly and there was an effort to curtail that, and this was what was done. Systems like ours run in about 13 different rural counties across New York State. So the two systems were piggybacked if you will, so that a county could afford to run both a small public transportation system and a Medicaid system within their county. In Tioga County we have had the same provider of that service since 1991 under a few different names. The Company has changed, but it has been the same provider.

“The method of transport that is used is two fixed routes. There are eight fixed routes in the County that individuals can access and fares on those fixed routes range from \$1.00 to \$5.00, and senior citizens get half price on those fees, and monthly passes are also available, \$30.00 within the County and \$60.00 if it is a monthly pass to an outside of the County route. The other component of the system is Dial-A-Ride. This is for transports that do not fall within the fixed route, but that you have a desire to take, that you contact them, you contact First Transit within 24 hours and they coordinate those rides. The fares are zone based within the County and range from \$3.00 to \$6.00. We do have dispensation from DOT to go into some of the service providers in the Sayre area because Tioga County residents rely so heavily on those services. Normally you would not be allowed to go outside of the County borders, but that is allowed in this instance.

“If you look at some of the numbers very quickly, I am not going to bore you with statistics, but I feel that we need to at least share some of them. I have a chart on there that shows five year ridership history and you can see that the public ridership, and I put the five year period of the most recent contract with First Transit, which is 2003 through the last completed year of 2007, and of course we are in the last year now, 2008, and you can see that ridership has gone from a little more than 53,000 to 65,600 over the course of those years. What the trends look like for that time period is a 26% increase in public ridership and 18% reduction in Medicaid ridership, but overall because the public ridership is so much higher it still results in a 24% overall increase in ridership since 2003.

“An interesting statistic that I will talk more about what it means, in 2003 Medicaid ridership took up 22.1% of the total ridership. In 2007 that was down to 14.7% of the total ridership. What that, of course, means is that there is a higher percentage of individuals utilizing the system for public transportation purposes than for Medicaid. One of the interesting things about that is it is really the Medicaid system and I will get to this in a minute as to why this is important. It is the Medicaid system that really within the contract that we currently have provides the only area of incentive built in for First Transit to control and coordinate the rides that are happening.

“Systems utilizations, the system operates 255 days a year, no weekends, and six holidays they are closed. We have for the last few years experimented with a summer Owego loop Monday through Saturday which each year gets a little more popular with a 50 cent fair, and it runs about eight loops during the course of the day through different stops in Owego. Our average ridership per day in 2007 was 257 riders.

“At the top of page three just gives you a comparison to give you some idea of the size of our system in comparison to neighboring counties. The annual passenger miles for 2006, and these are figures from the Federal Transit database, so that is why 2007 were not available to me, but it just shows our system is small. We moved 477,000 miles in 2006. As you can see compared to much larger volume for our larger neighbors, over nine million in Broome, two and a half million miles in Chemung, and seven and a half million miles in Tompkins County.

“The current contract costs in 2007, because those are the numbers we are talking about tonight, the Medicaid contract was \$329,964.00 and for the public transportation contract was \$812,752.00, and it is a combined contract, but those figures are delineated within the contract. What I want to do is breakdown a little bit what that costs means and again these numbers are from the Federal Transportation database based on the reporting that goes in to them. The chart at the bottom of page three shows operating expenses in 2006 for the fixed route component of the system and you can see Tioga County is significantly less than those neighboring counties that run a lot more miles, and that is simply because we are operating a small system. We only have 16 vehicles. We are not going a lot of miles. We are not running continuous routes seven days a week like these other routes are so their per vehicle mile is going to be significantly higher than our. It is important to note that those three counties put a significant amount of local dollars into their transportation systems while Tioga County puts none other than the local share of Medicaid which those other counties have the same responsibility for as well.

“Per passenger mile it becomes more in line and that is because they are moving a lot more people than we are, but we are still at the low end for that. Per passenger mile in Tioga County in 2006 was 80 cents a mile and you can see that those other numbers were comparable with the neighboring counties ranging from 98 cents up to \$1.44 in Chemung County. For Dial-A-Ride it starts to flatten out a little bit because Tioga County is more rural and we have fewer routes so we get more Dial-A-Ride requests because we are not going as many places as often as other larger systems do. Our per vehicle mile it is a little higher than Tompkins, but still significantly lower than Broome and Chemung, but our per passenger mile is where it starts to get higher. You can see that ours was 582 versus Broome’s of 225. Chemung and Tompkins numbers were not available and I apologize for that, I could not get them.

“The sources of the funding that pays for this, of course there are fares and in 2007 First Transit collected \$148,888.00 in fares. That gets deducted from the contract costs for the public transportation piece and the rest of that money is paid to the First Transit with pass through dollars by the County of what is called STOA, State Transportation Operating money, and then we get two small pots of Federal money, 5307 money and 5311 dollars. 5307 money is usually around \$42,000 a year and the 5311 money I think this past year was around \$112,000 so the bulk of that balance of \$663,000 comes from State operating money.

“The Medicaid costs per trip are a more frightening figure. You can see what the contract costs have done over the last five years and because that cost has gone up and the number of trips have gone down, the per trip cost has gone up about 65% since 2003 which is not an increase that is to alarming because of what has gone on in the costs of the industry, however it does point out that that is an area where a provider can try to economize as best as possible and it is also an area where we can really go after some cost savings in the next contract round to try to get those numbers back into a more acceptable range. Still all in all if you look at that \$34.20 per trip if we take someone from Owego to Wilson Hospital, approximately 40 miles, you are still talking about 86 cents a mile so it is not that far out of whack from the cost of the public transportation piece. It is just tracked differently.

“The funding sources for Medicaid transportation is just like the funding sources for every other piece of Medicaid with a couple of exceptions, 50% Federal, 25% State, and 25% local so you can see that that figure, the local tax dollar figure in 2007, was \$82,491. The breakdown of that becomes a bit more of a less impacting at the local district since the State finally had the wisdom to put the Medicaid cap in place a few years ago, so as Medicaid costs increase we are held harmless, but this is a component of the Medicaid cost and it is still a tax expense no matter how you look at it, whether it be Federal, State, or local.

“The current fleet, we have two 41 passenger Thomas’ buses which are the newest vehicles, which are 2007 vehicles, which hopefully someone in the audience is speaking on the quality of those vehicles. We have one 35 passenger Transmark Eldorado which is one of the older vehicles. We have one 20 passenger International Eldorado which is a 2003 and then we have twelve 16 passenger Eldorado’s, 11 of those are 2003 and 1 is a 2000. That figures in to the 5311 capital funding that the County has received and we have received from, and again these are Federal dollars that has a small State match, and then any local costs are picked up by the provider, in this case First Transit, and if it were to become a new provider it would be picked up by that provider, so there are 5 medium duty and 7 light duty mid size vehicles for a total of 12. Those vehicles have not been selected yet. We just got the final approval on the funding so there will be a significant process that has to be gone through to select those vehicles. In coordination with the

Department of Transportation we want to get as much feedback from riders as possible and also will impact what we decide and hear from you in regards to any potential route changes because we may want to change the size of the vehicles, which State DOT will allow us to do as long as we stay within the confines of what the award allocation was. What we will be replacing are the twelve 16 passenger vehicles which are all significantly approaching the mileage limits at this point in time.

“There are also some smaller items included in the capital funding which are good things. One of the things that came out of our transportation advisory council a few years back was to utilize bike racks on the vehicles. It is very popular in Tompkins County where someone combines bus transportation with bike transportation where they can throw their bike on the bus and move about so we will be able to equip at least eight of our vehicles with bike racks. We are getting some computer and scheduling software which will be the property of the County so if the provider changes that stays ours. We will be able to purchase new fare boxes. Something that is new to the County and which will have to involve some communication with communities about placement which has not even begun yet, are four passenger shelters to put in places where we think they would be most effective and utilized throughout the County. A GPS vehicle locator system, we still have pockets in the County that no matter what type of communication device you use you have pockets of dead spots, and the total award for all of that was 1.14 million dollars.

“Where do we go from here and this is where it turns over to you as the public. Obviously tonight we are gathering public input from you which I need to hear and the Legislature needs to hear because some difficult decisions will need to be made about how we move forward. We also, I hope many of you saw the survey that was in the Pennysaver. It is also available on line and we have copies of them here tonight. It is in a different format, but it is the same survey so if you have already filled the survey out and sent it in please do not do it again because we do not want to skew the data, but we have already received quite a few surveys and we hope that tonight, even if you do not leave it tonight, you will take one with you and get it to us.

“Then we hope to, after tonight’s input and the compilation of data from the survey, make some short-term changes. If we find out for example from tonight that the best thing to do based on public input is to add two or three more routes to Tompkins County and eliminate a route to somewhere else, you know we are going to take serious note of that and that will go before the Legislature to make some decisions. After we do that we will develop and print new schedules. We have heard it, we know, they are terrible. We are working with DOT to improve the schedule so it is much more reader friendly. It will have a very different and more user friendly look, and we will also develop sheets for individual routes so that

people do not get overwhelmed if they are just interested in one route. Then we need to improve marketing and again we are doing that with the assistance of the Department of Transportation.

“The new RFP specs that will go out for the bid effective January 2009 will require that one component of the RFP will require an annual marketing plan with a cost associated with it because currently there simply are no dollars available. To be quite frank with you, whatever we are doing right now, the survey, anything else we are doing, even printing of schedules in the past, comes out of the Department of Social Services. We are going to require that there be an associated cost and expense with that, and that the new vendor be able to provide us with a quality marketing plan that matches with what DOT expectations are as well as the counties. We then will issue the RFP. Our goal was to issue that RFP in the beginning of June. Obviously if we are going to make some changes and get good feedback tonight and through the survey we will put that off a month or two. We cannot put it off to long because if it is a new provider they have to have a window of opportunity to get in here and set the system up and takeover for the previous provider effective January 1, 2009. We are prepared to put it off, but we cannot put it off to far, that is why we have to move quickly on the feedback that we get from you all.

“In 2009 the new bid holder will be expected to work with the County to make additional route adjustments with more in depth analysis. I have certainly learned from my experience in Social Services, which is what my experience is, I assure you my background is not public transportation, but it is quickly becoming that. We want to do this right. We were willing and we have come to the plate and we are going to make some immediate changes if that is what the right thing is to do, however we do not want to create a haphazard system based on wrong information. We are going to make any appropriate changes that we need to make up front and then we will expect either if it is the existing vendor or a new vendor, and there will be performance measures about this written into the RFP and contract process that will tie in the performance and what this vendor gets paid with their ability to keep the system up to par with what the needs of the County are, and right now that does not exist. That has been a problem and we are going to change that. There will be those performance measures in there, DOT has already started to model a couple of contracts from other counties with that, so we will be following that trend and we will be making that happen through the RFP process. It is kind of two phase, some short-term appropriate fixes right now, and then when we get the RFP process done and we get the vendor established January 1, 2009, then we will ramp it up with a much more in depth analysis to make changes. This, of course, all ties in with I will use the term “perfect storm”, but I use that in a good way in that we have got all these things happening at once. We have got the new vehicles coming, we have got the bid process happening, and then on the bad side we have got the gas price escalations. We have to meet the needs of the community.

“Public transportation in a rural county is a sticky wicket. It is hard to educate people about it, but we think we can do that. It is hard to encourage people to use the system if they have never gotten on a bus before in their life or a public transit bus, but we think we can make that better. It will never be in a rural community a taxi service. People have to not have that expectation, but because there is a Dial-A-Ride component to it, it can be a very valuable service and I will close with citing an example of one of the things that was in the reader’s column. Someone wanted to be able to go to Tioga Downs to have lunch and play games or whatever, and the county is never and I would never support an increase in local costs to be able to provide that kind of specific routing change unless it was tied in to commuter where we were getting employees there and it was highly utilized, but if there is one or two people in the County who want to do that, the Dial-A-Ride does that, you just have to make your decision 24 hours in advance, you cannot wake up that morning and expect it to happen, and that is kind of my example of how it will never be a taxi service, but it can be darn close if we educate people about what is available and what we can do to get people different places in the County.

“With that because I will not be back up here tonight I guess, I want to thank you all for coming. I expect this to be a very informative evening for us tonight and I just cannot say thank you enough for the huge turnout.”

Lola Walker spoke. “A lot of people are wondering how this all got started and especially I get that question to me quite a lot. The question began in my head in early fall of 2006. I wrote my first letter to the Pennysaver in November of 2006, so Shawn and I have been chatting back and forth quite a while. As a volunteer at the Community Center I realized there was no service at that location. Yes you can say that it is on the schedule, but it only goes there twice a day versus the schedule indicating four times. The bus picks up Meals on Wheels for the Waverly area at 10:17 a.m. at the back of that building. The bus comes around to the front and if no one is there he just flies right on by. There is no signage at that location. There is no bench to sit on and many seniors cannot stand ten or twenty minutes outside waiting for a bus. There is a sign in the lobby that states, “If you are waiting for the bus wait outside.” Even the Parkview is more polite than that.

“Anyway that is what peaked my curiosity and got the ball rolling. After that meetings were held with Shawn Yetter and Gary Grant to clarify and obtain information as we the members of the Tioga Woman for Democracy were interested in why many of the issues existed. Why are our Vets unable to get the bus to Binghamton VA in time to meet the connections to Syracuse and Wilkesbarre for treatment? Why is not there any service to our seniors and low income housing? Why is not there any service to many of our major employers? Why does the bus only go to Ithaca once a day when it is the most utilized route and many people would like to go there shopping or for doctors appointments or whatever. Why does

the schedule show a bus after nine p.m. when the buses stop running at six? Why and how come the bus drives right by the Binghamton University but does not stop?

“Why does the bus go to BCC and arrive after 8:00 a.m. in the morning when lots of classes start at 8:00 a.m.? Why does the bus go to Lockheed and not accommodate the shift changes? Why don’t we have service to Tioga Downs? Why are the bus shelters still in storage and not in place? What is the problem? Why don’t we have proper signage throughout the County that indicates where the buses stop? What is so difficult? Why did our County Legislators and County employees allow this mess to happen? Because you do not utilize this system is no excuse for negligence when this company receives their payment every month regardless of the service of quality and lack of quality. Hopefully just because our County Legislature and County Employees are not on welfare, let us hope and pray that that department is not in the shape this one is in.

“The County does have a group called the Tioga Transit Advisory Council headed by Gary Grant. This group meets four times a year. The only effective person on that Board is Pat Gause and she is ignored and treated with disrespect. Several times Carol Sweeney has mentioned that the bus schedules are hard to understand. Visitors at the meetings have raised questions and were told this is not a forum. There does not seem to be any action taken by this group to improve this horrible system. All thought provoking information is brushed aside, so what is their purpose? Why has it been necessary for the public to become involved in this situation? Why has it been neglected for years? Why has there been so much controversy around this system?

“Employees of the County are compensated extra for managing and overseeing the bus system that is contracted out to First Transit Inc. Again why do we give First Transit over 1 million dollars a year of taxpayer money without receiving quality service for our residents? Where have our representatives and county employees been that are supposed to safeguard the taxpayers dollars?

“This County could become a hero in the state by utilizing this opportunity to improve our system and improve this service to our residents. We could have a quality public transportation system serving both the non-emergency Medicaid and the public riders. All we need is some very basic business decisions that would allow a workable schedule that services more, not all, of our residents needs, signage throughout the county, clean well maintained buses, better more accurate equipment to collect fees and computerized card readers for transfers and monthly ridership, shelters and benches at appropriate stops in place. We need marketing and more communication.

“The Tioga Women for Democracy are willing to assist Shawn Yetter’s group in any way to improve this situation. We want Shawn to know that we feel he has worked hard for our County, but that he needs to tighten the leash on some of his employees, also the Tioga Transportation Advisory Council needs to be more proactive in initiating improvements to our public transportation. We want the same thing that Shawn wants. We want a better public transportation system in this county, a bigger bang for our buck. Thank you.”

Peter Schiraldi spoke. “Hi, I am Peter Schiraldi, President and Business Agent of ATU 1145, which I represent First Transit employees right along with Broome Transit Employees. I got a couple of concerns. Really this is the first time I have ever been at a public forum where I could not ask questions so I will try to direct everything to more in statements and hopefully you guys are going to listen. With gas prices going up and ridership possibly to be increasing, if you really want to improve your system I think you need to look at a few things. One is the possibility of consolidating, which is a big topic in Albany. It is a big topic in Broome County. You should think about consolidating with Broome Transit, T-Cat, or even a possibility of just running the system yourself and eliminating First Transit. I cannot stress enough how First Transit is killing you guys. It is killing your public. I mean I will go on and waste my five minutes beating that one.

“Some of the things under your 5311, your GPS systems, vehicle locator system, I have a deep concern where my coach operators that I represent. You want to put a vehicle locator system in, yet you ever think about just using a basic radio system or repeaters? Your Sheriff’s Department uses them. Your Fire Service uses them. These coach operators are out there with cell phones, half of them get them, half of them do not. They have to use their own minutes. I am just looking at, let’s see where the bus is. How about making contact with the bus, start taking concern with the safety of the public and concern with the safety of the driver. You talk about buses, buying 5 medium size duties, seven, you know improve your fleet by having one size bus, then you can run it anywhere on any fleet, any run. I think you need to start considering that.

“You talk about and I know most of the people in Tioga County want to increase your runs. You have a problem with qualified drivers and getting drivers at First Transit. I think a lot of it has do with First Transit. Right now currently your Director of Operations, your supervisors, everybody but the guy in the garage, is helping to cover the runs when the drivers are not available. You want to increase your service you need to look at First Transit as a whole, as I think this is beating you guys up and you are paying for money that you are just throwing money away. I would gladly meet with the Legislators behind closed doors if you want to go further detail with this. I gave you my business card, but any questions contact me. Thank you.”

Charles Sellars spoke. "This is good that this meeting is well attended in the fact that it seems in the county in the last few years this the only way that things get changed. It is unfortunate but it is good that you people are all here and that the Legislators are getting on this, and we are getting on them to get on the Social Service people to get this bus system fixed. It is important that everybody work together and stay on this. I am not going to reiterate what other people have already said, but it was brought to my attention today in this building that the veterans in this county, and there is a lot of them that are poor and cannot get proper treatment, and that could be taken care of either in Binghamton, Sayre, Syracuse, Wilkesbarre, Scranton if they had a way to interchange with other buses, which they do not.

"At one time I was told that Broome County would not let us have transportation service up there to the Clinic. I called Barbara Fiala's office and that has turned out not to be true. The blame is here in this county. That could be easily corrected when you do the routes over, things you are going to do, it looks good, what it says what you are going to do would help. The veterans definitely need that along with the public and everybody else. It is king of up to us the public to stay on you people so you can stay on Mr. Yetter and he has got his plate full. I know Social Services, maybe Social Services is not the place to have this transportation thing because somebody is dropping the ball there and it has got to be taken care of. All of you people work at it and I am sure the public will do what they can and numerous groups are willing to help. Let's keep it up and keep the heat on."

Steve VanAustin spoke. "Hello, my name is Steven VanAustin. I am the Program Coordinator for Achieve and Country Valley Industries here in Owego. We run a vocational rehabilitation center where we employ thirty-eight developmentally citizens in the community. I am here to represent them as you consider the contract for this year. We have thirty-seven people who actually use transportation services. The average cost for that is \$215.00 a month. The service has been good, but it costly. Medicaid does reimburse us for some of that, but we are a private non-for-profit and we have to make up the difference. We have people who come in from Spencer, Waverly, Candor, and Richford on a daily basis. One of the reasons I think for the high cost is we are on a Dial-A-Ride despite the fact that we run the same route everyday with the same people everyday.

"The other issue that I think is important, developmentally disabled people are really completely reliant on public transportation. It is not just a convenience or a cost savings measure, this is the only way they have to get to work. They have a lot of special needs which I hope that we can make sure that we continue to reasonably accommodate these special needs. Some of them are the length of stay on the bus. People should not have to be on the bus for two or three hours just to get to work and back. Keeping in mind our people do not know how to read

schedules, they do not know how to tell time. There should be some special consideration for the drop off and pickup points, that they are safe for our people. The service has been satisfactory, but as I said it is costly and we would just like to make the point that developmentally disabled people are citizens of this county and reliant upon the public transportation. Thank you.”

Barb Heywood spoke. “I am a member of the Tioga, the notorious Tioga Women for Democracy group. We were really grateful that you all are working with the NYS Department of Transportation. That has made a big difference in just the last meeting that I attended. I would like to recommend that the officials consult the Town officials and with these local agencies just to make a personal contact. Certainly some of the supervisors or mayors may have some insight in to what there particular locations need. A lot of people have been wanting to be provided for, but at least to be heard in a specific way. Also I would like to see the Chamber of Commerce more active, maybe they are, but I would like to know that they are more actively involved in making sure that seniors and other people who do not have transportation can go someplace, shop, go to a restaurant. I do not see what is wrong with providing that kind of thing in this transportation business. Thanks.”

Blanche McGuire spoke. “I am Blanche McGuire and I am just a parent of one if those handicapped people that work at Achieve that Steve mentioned. I am concerned that my daughter has to ride the bus to get to work and they keep getting later and later in the morning picking her up, and then every little whipstitch they bring her home an hour or so earlier so she is not there to earn any money, and it is taking away one of her rights to be sort of independent by earning and being out on her own somewhat. Thank you.”

John Breon spoke. “I drive one of the transit buses that go to Ithaca and Waverly everyday. What I wanted to address is the quality of the buses. When you are specking out, the two Thomas buses we have now only have three heaters on one side of the bus. The windows are all loose, the people that ride it in the winter time stuff plastic bags in the window to keep the air from coming in. The air conditioning, it is fine for the passengers in the back part of the bus, but the front part of the bus gets no air at all the way they are set up. Whose ever is going to speck out the buses they should take these things into consideration. The buses we have got appear to be rejects to be honest with you and they saw the county come along and they gave them to them. The buses are in the garage, either one of them almost every week. Mine is in the garage right now because the tie rods are already worn out and it is only got 76,000 miles on it. We had to put new tires on it. For some reason it is leaking coolant, we can not figure out where. Everyday I put a gallon of coolant in it. These things get expensive and work on the maintenance cost when you do this everyday, and if you are going to buy eleven more new buses, you ought to look at these things and not buy the rejects. Thank you.”

Madonna Gould spoke. "I do not have anything prepared, but I just want to say I lived in Ithaca for about twenty-eight years when I worked at Cornell University. I had a car, but I used to leave it at home and take the transportation system because of the congestion and the B lot where I had to park my car, and got kind of spoiled because you can take buses anywhere to any of the grocery stores, to any of the malls, and when I moved here, I have been here for about five years, live on Dean Street up here, and I no longer have a car. I am 70 and on Social Security. I am not going to buy one, but I had no way of transportation and so for a while in order to go grocery shopping I had to take a taxi down and a taxi back. I could only go locally in the local market area downtown. I wanted to go to the P&C and the Price Chopper, but it was over \$10.00 to go by taxi at that time. After I got to know some of the neighbors I have been able to get rides, not consistently and not always where I want to go, but because of this one problem of transportation I am very seriously thinking of moving somewhere where they do have a better transportation system for me right now."

"I know that there are people up there, there is a neighbor of mine who is on Medicaid and is dependant on the buses because she was told by her doctor two years ago that she could no longer drive because of vertigo, a dizziness problem. I know she calls up for a ride or whatever, and you have to call like twenty-four hours in advance and some of the others that go down below like to the hospitals and Packer and like that, cannot manipulate the buses, a lot of leg problems, spinal and stuff like this getting up and down on the steps and like that. I do feel that this is a major necessity in this area."

Shannon Barbuto-Lewis spoke. "Hi, I am Shannon Barbuto-Lewis. I am a trustee, I represent the Dean Street area of low income senior housing, and I was supporting Madonna, but also knocked on doors today and spoke with a few residents there were not able to make it today. Mrs. Curtis would like to take the bus. It does not work out for her. Mrs. Fuller would like to go to the Community Center and she has not been able to do that. Mrs. Crowfoot she needs to go to Wilson Hospital every week for chemo, but they said they would only take her to Washington Avenue. I do not know if Dial-A-ride, she is tried it and just has to stay there to many hours before she is picked back up. Thank you."

Pat Gause spoke. "I am Pat Gause and I live in the Town of Owego, and when the bus service first started it came up into where I live, which is the Lincolnshire Development and they tried it for a month and then the bus went away. I asked about it and they said well nobody rode it. Nobody in the neighborhood even knew it was there but me and I was out advocating for the buses. I have been advocating for the buses since long before it started and I have to commend the county for trying to get a system going, and we are not a metropolitan system, we are a rural system. We all have to understand there is a difference between the two things. That difference is in the scheduling, but there is no excuse

for not having the bus stops numbered with a schedule on that bus stop sign that says when the buses are going to come to that area, or if there is going to be a Dial-A-Ride and have to do a twenty-four hour thing, if they are going to take them at 8:00 in the morning for whatever it is, and they want to come home and they have to come back at 10:30, they should be able to get that bus there to get them back. I do not know how many in this room have sat in the hospitals and waited, it is not a fun thing especially after you have gone through a procedure that is life threatening if you do not have it and you do not know if you are going to get there, and then everything builds up on you.

“We have got to do something to look at a larger system than just the buses and scheduling. We have to look at all the transportation options that this county has. We need to put together a study on it. We have got all these people sitting in the room, we have the ladies with their group, and what we need is collection people for information. I would suggest that we as a people sitting in this room after this meeting is over go and talk to Mrs. Walker and Barb Heywood, and say I want to help. What do you want me to do? What we want you to do is start looking at the transportation that is available in your area. Stop thinking about just buses, you have other things going on besides just buses. You have buses, you have taxis, you have church groups, you have all kinds of people that help out with getting people to places, and if you can get those all into the loop of how you transport people within the county, and then you also include the buses in it and you stop having overlaps and things we can save money on how we get everybody there plus we can get the people where they have to go without worrying about schedules and schedules here start at what 8:00 in the morning and close down at 5:00.

“I do not know where you live, but I live in a neighborhood everybody is going out at 6:00 in the morning to get to work and everybody is coming home at 6:00 or 6:30, and we have mothers cued at every school for late activities that are going on. They have got five kids in the car, everybody is screaming their hungry, where do they go, they go to McDonald’s every night to feed these kids instead of home getting the dinner ready for them. We should have buses going in there, work with the schools, work with their schedule, and have your bus stops where kids can walk in either direction to get home. It will not kill them to walk a little bit after they get off, but the thing is that we have got to start thinking different because you cannot idle a car at \$4.00 a gallon waiting for somebody to come out of a building. We have got to have public transportation. We have got to start thinking about getting people to work. We are a county that is trying to build ourselves an industry with getting companies that want to be here and we are not helping them getting the people there. I have been told, well they do not say anything and they do not seem to care. Has anybody ever gone to these companies and really talked to them? Put them down into a room and said what are your schedules? How many people do you think would be interested in public transportation? How can we help you, instead of the other way around them always helping us?

“I just get very frustrated. I have been very fortunate to travel in Europe where you fly into an airport, you get on the train, or you get on the bus and you go to where you want to go. We cannot even get to the airport, let alone get on the plane, and if we get on the plane we may not go and then again we may. We have got railroad situations going on. Transportation is not just buses, transportation is foot, bicycle, cars, trains, planes, and heaven knows maybe some day we will be able to go into a telephone booth and dial it up and get where we want to go. That is what I would like, but then I would have to have the luggage at the other end so I would be in trouble, but I think we have to think outside of the box with our transportation, we have to be supported by the county big time and the towns.

“The towns are just as important as the counties and the villages are just as important as the counties and towns. Everybody has to start working together to provide a situation where we can get our citizens where they want to go in a timely manner, that does not mean it is going to happen like getting in a private car and going. I do not know about you, but we are indebted to the world for gasoline and for oil, and it is not going to get better ladies and gentlemen, it is going to get worse, and we have to come up with solutions in this rural area to get everybody where they need to go in a timely manner. I will continue to be a thorn in the committee’s side as long as they will have me, but I hope that we can all start working together, get with these people, voice your opinions, and help with the solution. Do not just sit and complain, help with the solution, and thank you for coming. This is wonderful that people are interested.”

Karl Tieman spoke. “Less than a week ago I was on a forty-eight hour bus trip that went through seven states and in the course of that distance there were several terminals and several connections from one bus to another, and I can tell you that the good ones were really appreciated where there was a good place to wait for the next bus and a timely connection. I cannot say that for all of the places though because it ended up more than the forty-eight hours than it was supposed to be, but now I notice in today’s Press and Sun Bulletin there is an article that states that today they started breaking ground on a new transportation center in Binghamton, which would be a terminal for Greyhound, Shortline, and the BCC buses, and so the point I want to make you is that I hope that our Tioga County buses could connect to that terminal and that would be really appreciated by the traveling public. I know because the experience of making those connections is held fresh in my mind a matter of days ago. Thank you.”

Betty Wood spoke. “I am pleased to see such a good turnout. My experience with the bus system, the first time I was in elementary school. I went from Waverly to Sayre and back again for music lessons. The bus was there, I knew where the bus was going to be, it was there every half hour. If I dolted and was late I knew I could hustle to another block and get the bus as it came around. Elementary School, that was back when the tires were square, but even so. Another experience I

had, I was in Illinois or Indiana or someplace out there, public transportation all the way. I took the train back, got to Syracuse. I used buses to get to from Syracuse to my home on Blodgett Mills. It took longer to get from Syracuse to Blodgett Mills than it took to get from wherever I was out west to Syracuse. That is not good. Alright now where are we now?

“I work two mornings a month at the Tioga County Jail. I do not believe the buses go there, not sure that it would be appropriate for me to do, but the jail has a lot of employees. It also has a lot of people there. Most of the people, rich people or those with means do not stay in jail. It is those without money that stay in jail, whether they have been sentenced or not. A lot of people are in jail who have not even been tried for it because they do not have the money. An important point for the people in jail is to have contact with their families. If their families do not have cars, how do they get to visit the people that are in jail? It is not just, as you were talking about you do not take people to Tioga Downs to have lunch. Tioga Downs has a number of employees and the jail has a number of employees so I think that the whole question needs to be a matter of how many of those employees, not the bosses necessarily, they have got their SUV’s or whatever to get around, but a lot of the employees I think would use a bus transportation if it were available.

“I think you need to do some sort of survey within some of these other employers to find out do their employees, let the employees answer the surveys, would they use the buses? When do their shifts begin and when do they end so that it can be more responsive. Probably smaller, you know the big buses, I do not know who they are used for but I would think that in a rural community more of the smaller buses would be more economical all the way around, cheaper to run and you can have more of them to have more flexibility. Thank you.”

Wanda Harding spoke. “Hi, I work for a non-profit agency in Binghamton and I live in Tioga County. I work with this agency and we provide different services for people with disabilities so some of what I am going to say is somewhat of a repeat after the gentleman from Achieve. I am here to represent people that depend on the service in order to get to work. It has been frustrating for me to see that they have to deal with the limitation of not only limited job availability and limited work skills at different times, but then on top of it to have to deal with the limitation of the transportation system that is available now.

“Overtime I have tried to place various people in Owego. For instance there was a situation with Tioga Downs. I was talking with the people at the bus transit and in order to get this person to come from above DSS where he lives down to Nichols was not so expensive, but from the T in Nichols instead of the left that they would normally make to take a right to go to Tioga Downs they wanted to charge \$3.00 dollars more. He would have been paying \$10.00 a day for transportation. He makes \$7.15 an hour and he works twenty hours a week. The disconnect between

the person telling me that and understanding the situation was very obvious. I could not figure that out, but what I am looking forward to is some of what Pat Gause had said. At the time I was discussing this with people they were saying well the ridership is not there, but with the gas prices increasing and hopefully and increasing ridership we could end up with a bus system that is not only affordable but efficient. Also to address the Dial-A-Ride, recently I just placed somebody at KFC here in Owego and the person does not start until 11:00. I was told that the Dial-A-Ride is not always available so he has to get on the bus and come to work almost two hours early everyday and wait to start work, and then pick the bus up and go home. He is working right now three days a week with hopefully going to five.

“The other issue is this, a person coming especially from the even more rural areas and people with disabilities, they are working to try to develop the work skills and the work foundation to begin with, and that transportation system is their lifeline in order to do that. If they do not get to do it especially young, you will end up with somebody thirty or forty years old with a disability who has never had the chance to work and I do not have to describe how that turns out. So anyway affordable efficient public transportation would be really great. Thanks.”

Dave Schnitzler spoke. “My name is Dave Schnitzler, I am the Recording Secretary for ATU 1145 and it seems to me that a lot of your difficulties could be solved if we work out a system of interline between Tioga County and Broome County as well as Ithaca. If you have the ability to interline your services your bus only needs to come as far as Endicott. I connect everyday with Tioga County every morning on Washington Avenue. People get off of her bus, transfer over to me, go to work. It would save you the fuel mileage, which all of us in the transportation industry, I think we are paying almost \$4.00 a gallon for Broome County for fuel ourselves, so we if we had the ability to interline Tioga with Broome, with T-Cat, with whomever we need to would cut down the amount of distance that the buses have to travel.

“Another thing that would save you would be commuter service. For the distance that you have to go here, you have a central or two or three central areas to pick up people, we use it all the time. We use it for our ARC people. They ride a commuter service. That is their bus, nobody else gets on that. That is their bus. We provide that to get them from point A, point B. They work in three or four different facilities in Broome County and we transport them that way. That is their bus. We also get federal grant money to help offset the cost of their bus pass, which they just swipe through the fair box and that is the end of it. This seems exorbitant for someone who is a handicap laborer who wants to work to be paying \$10.00, \$15.00 a day for a bus ride. If you applied for federal grant money to overcome that expense in order to help them, really it would help anybody in the county.

“Broome County is \$35.00 for a bus pass and you can use that thing 2000 times in a thirty day period, and it prints right on the back so it does not make any difference what day you activate that pass. It is good for thirty days until midnight of that thirtieth day, then it is no longer any good, but you can ride the bus 2000 times, but that federal grant money makes a big impact on the cost for your passengers and you got to knock that down somehow. The new transportation hub in Binghamton would make a big help for Tioga. You can bring your veterans there. We have half hour service to the Veterans’ Center and Greater Binghamton Health Care Center. We have half hour service all day long. It starts at 5:50 in the morning and you could get the veterans up there to the Veterans’ Center, those that can be treated in Binghamton. Those that need to go to Syracuse can connect with the van there, but we could work that out I think between Broome Transit, T-Cat, or whomever we need to. I think interline is going to be the greatest thing that is going to impact you as far as your transportation needs.

“Bus stop signs, with the schedules on them they are especially something very beneficial for you. You have a small system, does not need a lot of space to put that on there. Raleigh, North Carolina uses those everywhere. Their whole system, you have to buy a packet of schedules if you want to go anywhere as a visitor, but the people who live and work everyday, they look on the bus stop sign where they wait every morning. They know what time the bus is coming. They know what time it is coming back through there and their returns. This cuts down on the paper, cuts down on the expense for you to print all those things. Those things are brutal you know they really put a dent in your budget, but I would seriously look into the grant money. We need to overcome the duplication of service.

“I see Tioga County transit buses running to places where we are going, sometimes with twenty minute service for Broome Transit so if we can work that scheduling out, that would be a great benefit to the people of Tioga County to be able to come into Broome, transfer to a bus on Washington Ave. Your bus does not have to go any further. You can run it back here and put it on another line and cover the people here in Tioga County much better than right now. Right now it is pitiful, it is so spotty. I really have to hand it to the drivers who are out there pushing the limit everyday trying to make connections that are almost impossible to do, but if we can work that out schedule wise that would be a tremendous benefit. Bring your bus right into the Broome County facility, drop your people off, and let your bus come back here, or pick up people there. I bring people to Washington Avenue that want to come down here, but the service to Washington Avenue back to here is spotty at the best. So if we can work out those kinds of bugs, I think we can make a big improvement for all of our transportation systems, and it will be a big benefit for everyone.

There being no further comments, the hearing was adjourned at 8:16 p.m.