

Chisago-Isanti County Heartland Express

April 16, 2020

Phone Conference

Present via Phone: Paul Smith – Heartland Express Transit Director, Mike Warring – Isanti County Commissioner, Mike Robinson – Chisago County Commissioner, Dave Oslund – Isanti County Commissioner, George McMahon – Chisago County Commissioner, Chase Burnham – Chisago County Administrator, Julia Lines – Isanti County Administrator, Penny Messer – Isanti County Family Services Director, Bob Benson – Chisago County Human Services Director.

New Business

General Department Updates –

Paul informed the group that Heartland Express recently hired Randy Bollinger, a new part time driver, and was in the process of interviewing for an open part time dispatcher position. Driver staffing levels are nearing full strength.

Current COVID-19 Actions –

Paul stated that in order to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, Heartland Express has begun disinfecting the buses with a bleach solution at the end of each day, and extra cleaning measures are taking place as time allows throughout the driver's shift. Heartland Express has also seen a dramatic reduction in ridership, and an increase in staff requesting time off for COVID prevention purposes. This has allowed the opportunity to rotate the bus fleet so not all buses are used every day, allowing germs to dissipate.

Community Engagement –

Paul stated that newspaper ads and radio spots are being utilized to communicate free rides currently being offered to the general public. Social media posts and postings on the bus are also advertising our increased cleaning procedures.

MnDOT Program Changes –

Paul stated that MnDOT recently advised the 5311 transit providers that they would be covering 100% of all operational expenses for approximately the next six months. They are doing this to support the local transit systems, who are projected to have a 75% reduction in ridership through 2020. During this period, there will be no expected County match for funding, and they will also cover the wages of furloughed employees. MnDOT also stated that all funding and operational changes will be decisions made at the local level.

Suggested Temporary Operational Changes –

Paul informed the group that he was planning to carry out the following changes at Heartland Express.

- Continue free fares through June 1, 2020.
- Continue operating a decreased number of routes in order to allow drivers to take time off and to rotate the bus fleet for cleaning considerations.
- Implement a no overtime and no shift replacement policy throughout the summer months due to the decrease in ridership numbers

COVID-19 Union Concerns –

Paul stated that he had spoken with Martin Goff, the business agent from the Teamsters Local #320. Martin had received concerns from the Heartland Express drivers regarding COVID and requested that they receive hazard pay and that plastic barriers be installed in the buses to isolate the drivers. Paul stated that he informed Martin about the increased cleaning procedures as well as the permission given to the drivers to wear masks. Paul denied the request for hazard pay as that was a contractual issue and not one that could be made at the department level. The staff at Heartland Express also researched the possibility of barriers being put in place, but no commercial options are currently available. It was determined that creating our own barriers would be an unacceptable liability risk for vision and collision considerations.

Driver & Staff Confidentiality Advisory –

Paul expressed concerns about the potential for drivers to have access to COVID related medical information. Julia Lines offered to prepare a confidentiality agreement for all Heartland Express staff to sign. The forms will be distributed to all staff.

Other Business

None.

COVID Meeting Dates

As needed.