

Significant bus schedule changes in BlueGo's future

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Despite a room full of MV Transportation officials, the wheels are literally and figuratively in motion to move them out and TRC Consultants in.

Much of Friday morning's South Tahoe Area Transit Authority's board meeting was what bus service on the South Shore may look like in the future.

During public comment, Nate Smith, president of the western division of MV, said STATA's interpretation of the letter his company sent on May 17 is not accurate and that "we believe little or no effort was made to resolve the issues."

At issue is the more than \$2 million STATA owes MV as well as what the exact dollar figure is. MV wanted to suspend service until some cash had been handed over. STATA's response was to cancel the contract.

During a break Smith told *Lake Tahoe News* that transitioning from one company to another in such period of time would be hard to do. But Smith said all license numbers on the BlueGo buses for California and Nevada will be off by the noon June 20 deadline and that his firm will do what it can to make things go as smooth as possible.

Bob Blanchet with the Teamsters Union flew out from the East Coast for the meeting and was silenced by board Chairwoman Nancy McDermid when he tried to speak about employees and if the new company would honor the union. He arrived late and was not able to speak during the open comment period.

"Sir, I'm asking you to sit down," McDermid told Blanchet as

he tried to get out a few words.

“No way in hell are they (union friendly),” Blanchet told *Lake Tahoe News* in reference to TRC.

The 70 employees of MV joined the Teamsters this year. STATA officials have said they want to keep the employees. The union issue is not being discussed openly.

Before going into closed session the board voted on TRC’s contract, with all but board member Stacy Dingman saying yes.

“I would love the luxury of more time to do more personal investigation to feel I have all of the information,” Dingman said after the meeting in reference to TRC.



Gordon Shaw of
LSC
Transportation
Consultants
talks to the
STATA board on
June 4.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

Most of the morning was spent listening to Gordon Shaw with LSC Transportation Consultants out of Tahoe City give a presentation about money, equity and efficiency. The operations committee of STATA is going to meet next week, with the whole board assembling the morning of June 25 to possibly take action on a short-term plan for the financially plagued

bus system.

In the presentation Shaw said the plan is to work with a \$4.56 million annual budget, put 10 percent in reserves and use \$70,000 to repay the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Some confusion was evident by the board as to whether the reserves would be used to pay the \$20,000 a month MV is supposed to start receiving July 1 or if more should be taken out off the top for that debt.

In the scenario presented by Shaw on June 4, it would mean 3,431 hours of service – or 5 percent – would have to be cut. This would bring bus service to 60,893 hours a year.

His presentation then focused on equity v. efficiency.

“Equity is when you have service everywhere. Efficiency is you put resources where the people need it most,” Shaw explained. “The last few year there was probably too much equity and not enough efficiency.”

Some of the proposals include increasing the number of buses on Highway 50, eliminating service in Meyers, disbanding neighborhood service at the Y and Al Tahoe areas, mixing skiers-regular users in the winter, and focusing primarily on the Y to Kingsbury Grade.

Everything is on the table. No decisions were made Friday. Timing was also talked about. Shaw proposes changing routes after Labor Day. Board members say the financial situation is so dire that taking action sooner, possibly in a staggered approach, may be what’s needed to keep the system running.

Five people spoke during the public comment period, including Blanchet who didn’t really get to speak.

John Stenersen, who is a BlueGo bus driver, cautioned the board to not blend skiers with regular riders because skiers leave behind wet seats and have their gear with them. He also

said it's necessary to pay attention to the size of bus being sent to the Ridge at the top of Kingsbury Grade because it's tight to get around up there.

Jennifer Rodriguez said she stopped riding BlueGo when the last set of changes went into place. She is also a dispatcher and said many people call about getting a ride to Barton Memorial Hospital.