

Rcat proposes simplifying, lowering county bus fares

BY ADAM STEWART
HUTCHINSON TRIBUNE STAFF

HUTCHINSON—Last July, the federal government ended a requirement that rural transit programs, such as Reno County Area Transit (Rcat), offer half-price fares for certain demographic groups including seniors and people with disabilities.

Rather than raising fares for groups that qualified for half-price fares, though, Rcat is proposing to reduce fares to the previous half-price rates. The Reno County Commission will consider the proposal—already approved by the Reno County Public Transportation Commission and the Kansas Department of Transportation—during its meeting at 9 a.m. on Wednesday, March 25, in the Veterans Room at the Reno County Courthouse.

Under the proposal, fares for fixed bus routes in Hutchinson and South Hutchinson would be reduced from \$1 to 50 cents each time a rider boards a vehicle. Additionally, paratransit fares would be reduced from \$2 to \$1, and rural trips in Reno County would be reduced from \$8 to \$4. Rcat Director Kandace Bonnesen wrote in a memo to the commission. The proposal also includes eliminating transfer tickets to save on paperwork.

If approved, there will be a mandatory 30-day public notice period for comments, and changes would take effect July 1.

Revenue from fares is a small portion of Rcat's budget, Bonnesen told The Hutchinson Tribune on Friday. Much of its funding comes from state and federal grants.

Rcat had 76,016 total riders in 2025. In other business, the County Commission also will consider the purchase of in-car and body-worn cameras from Motorola to replace the Reno County Sheriff's Office's current system for \$360,253.

Commissioners also will consider proposed grants of \$15,000 to Reno County Community Corrections and \$63,502 to Horizon's Mental Health Center from national opioid addiction settlement funds and \$20,000 to Community Corrections from alcohol tax funds, and a proposal from Extract Systems to redact personally identifiable information from approximately 250,000 digital historical land records for the Register of Deeds Office.

Consent agenda

As part of the consent agenda, commissioners will be asked to approve the purchase of 14 sets of personal protective equipment for Reno County Fire District 1 for \$73,042 from Delta Fire, the purchase of a digital firewall for the county's computer from Dell Technologies for \$33,870, and a letter of support for a KDOT grant application to help replace an 85-foot-long bridge over Goose Creek on Pretty Prairie Road about 10.3 miles west of Pretty Prairie.

South Hutch Council approves truck purchase, hears facilities assessment

BY CHARLES MELTON
HUTCHINSON TRIBUNE STAFF

HUTCHINSON—After hearing a report about the current status of the city's facilities, the South Hutchinson City Council unanimously approved the purchase of a new service truck for the city's street department for \$133,500.

South Hutchinson City Administrator Jeff Schenk explained that the funds come out of the city's reserve fund, which was set aside for situations like these.

"The way a way a reserve works is that our operating budget is our checkbook and our reserve is our savings account, and so at the end of the year, if we have money left in our checking account, we can move it to our savings and it counts as spent," he said. "So the next year it starts over."

Prior to the council approving the purchase of the new truck for the city's street department, Schenk gave a report on an assessment of all of the city's facilities that was conducted by JEO.

"We had three studies done when I first started. They were preliminary reports, one for wastewater facilities, and all wastewater stuff, one for water, and all of that apparatus, and then this one was for all of our buildings," he said. "This was an assessment to go over all of the buildings, equipment and any problems that may be associated with the buildings."

The assessment provides the city the information it needs build its inventory

list and begin better managing its assets, Schenk told the council.

While the assessment noted several Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance issues throughout the city's facilities, City Attorney Cody Smith offered clarification on those issues.

"Just to be clear on the ADA compliance and the building code compliance, it doesn't mean that the city's in violation of the code," Smith said. "Of course, once we do the updates here, that will trigger the requirement then to get those into compliance, but I just didn't anyone walking away from this thinking, 'Oh, the city's violating ADA.'"

During her council comments, Council member Valerie Griffin thanked Schenk for the facilities report and said she would like to see the improvements put in order of priority so the council can see what the most urgent issues are and begin addressing them.

"There are certain things in there that I feel like needs to be planned out, but then there's some other things that could be dealt with sooner," Griffin said. "They may not seem so much as a priority, but at the same time, they're a safety issue."

In other business, the council heard a report from Schenk about creating a program similar to Reno County's Brush Up program run by the city, approved a \$28,200 contract with SEH for work on the frontier water park and sewer project, approved a contract with FreshCo for cleaning services at city hall and the community center.

State ACLU director warns area's voting rights under attack

BY CHARLES MELTON
HUTCHINSON TRIBUNE STAFF

HUTCHINSON—Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Kansas Micah Kubic warned members of the Woman for Kansas Hutchinson chapter that voting rights are under attack when he visited Hutchinson on March 16.

"Right now, here in the state of Kansas, we face more attacks on voting wise than we have in a generation," Kubic said. "Right now, moving through the state legislature, are at least 20 separate bills that attack the right to vote."

All of the bills make it harder for people to register to vote, harder to turn out to vote, and harder to make their vote count, he said.

"There's a bunch of them. I don't know whether they have a machine or an AI thing, where they just type in, 'How can we suppress the vote today?' And it turns out new ideas for them," he said.

The current effort is led by Kansas House Elections Committee chairman Pat Proctor, who is running for the state's Secretary of State position, Kubic said.

"I say that it has gone beyond restrictions on voting rights. It's not just voter suppression anymore. It has become just plain anti-voting. It is against the very notion of voting," he said.

Because of Proctor's efforts, Kubic told the audience that the same of the House Elections Committee should be changed to the House Anti-Elections Committee instead.

"The thing that unites all of these attacks we hear about is that they're all about kicking somebody out," he said. "They're all about excluding someone from the community rather than including them."

Both the federal Constitution and the state Constitution both say that voting is a right, he said.

"Even those that do become law are going to run up against that grinder of the law, values, and people, and we are going to challenge those in every way we can, until we make sure that our democracy is strong here," he said.

The package of proposed voting



CHARLES MELTON/HUTCHINSON TRIBUNE

Micah Kubic, executive director of Kansas American Civil Liberties Union, speaks in Hutchinson.

bills is reminiscent of the days of the documentary proof of citizenship requirement under current Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach, which was defeated by voters when it was on the state ballot as a proposed constitutional amendment, Kubic said.

One of the bills would automatically remove voters from voter rolls if they don't vote in every election, he said.

"Guess what? Most people don't vote in every election. Sometimes the candidates ain't all that exciting. People don't turn out," he said. "You don't get kicked off the rolls just because you choose not to vote in any one given election."

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