

TAN asked all of the candidates for Mayor of the Unified Government of Wyandotte County/Kansas City, Kansas to answer questions about transit to help voters understand their positions on this critical issue. We appreciate candidates Janice Witt, Ann Murguia, Mark Holland and Nathan Barnes for talking the time to respond to our questionnaire and sharing their philosophy, vision and ideas on transit.

We have chosen questions on Transit Philosophy, Funding, Meeting Increased Transit Demand, KCATA, and Creating a Transit-Friendly Environment.

The whole document with all the responses can be downloaded at the end of the article. Be sure to send this article to citizens of Wyandotte County so they can be informed about the candidates' positions.

Transit is a major issue in Wyandotte County since there is significant demand for a good transit system from the citizens.

The answers are given in the order TAN received them. We do not endorse a particular candidate but believe voters should be well informed as to candidates' knowledge of the subject and their positions. The responses are color coded in order to improve ease of reading and finding the response from a particular candidate. The candidates' initials are used to identify their responses.

Section 1- Transit Philosophy

A. What do you see in the future for transit in Wyandotte County?



Janice Witt

JW - I see a beautiful transit system that is clean, efficient and respectful. One that is conducive for everyday riders to commute from and to any community or destination without trading their self- respect for a ride. I see beautiful, respectful and functional covered bus stops/landings with time and information accessible and powered by solar energy to maintain the positive green effects of the use of transit instead of personal transportation.

AM - We need to create the kind of public transportation system that incent ridership. I think we are off to a good start with the \$10 million grant we received to improve the State Avenue corridor, but we need to do more.

MH - I think we are going to have to be very creative in addressing the needs of our community. State and Federal funding has been under attack, and these funds are essential to providing the level of service necessary to serve our community. My hope is to improve access to transit.

I supported the "Complete Street" initiative that calls for more sidewalks. Without access for people to walk to the bus from their neighborhoods, it becomes very challenging to increase ridership.

NB - Under my administration I see Wyandotte County a fully integrated system with more routes and bigger buses.

B. Do you support continued county funding of public transit as an essential service throughout Wyandotte County?

JW- Yes, without transit the small businesses in Wyco would have no means to acquire manpower other than personal transportation. Without transit the poor will remain in the cycle of poverty because of a lack of transportation. If they have no access to fresh groceries and further education, the cycle of poverty

continues. Without transit there will continue to be a drain on mental well-being, health outcomes and isolation issues that plague Wyco.



Ann Murguia

AM - Yes...many WYCO residents depend on public transportation to meet their daily needs. The government needs to assist in developing a quality state of the art system that will create such demand, that over time, through ridership, will pay for itself.

MH - Yes. I wish it were stronger, but I believe there will always be a need for a local match for State and Federal funds.

NB - Yes. It is a city and county issue and our city and county should address funding.

C. Federal funding is dramatically decreasing for ALL transit. A decrease in State transit funding is also a possibility. Should Unified Government replace these lost funds, both capital and operating, in order to maintain the current level of transit service?

JW - I believe that there should be a small percent sales tax added in KCK, so that we can build ourselves the transit system that we need to make our community mobile and viable to incoming business, homeowners and new adventures both into the Northeast and our entire community. Edwardsville, Turner, Bonner all of these surrounding communities that are considered any part of KCK should have access to the positive effects of mass transit. It helps us all in the long run. I also hold no aversion to a bi-state tax and joining the concept of a regional transportation authority to give smooth, efficient service to all of our communities. Why do I find this acceptable? Because right now as we speak, Schlitebahn has a proposal before our commission to tax an additional 2% sales tax to build on to their already subsidized private venture waterpark. This has ZERO benefit to the everyday citizen of Wyandotte County. It is a personal or Corporate business expense that is being added on the people who will then have to pay exorbitant fees to get into the water park even though they have paid for it twice now at the cost of our fair grounds which gave Free access to the people of this county to educational and social experiences. Unlike a bus system, which would give access for minimal fees to anyone who needed transportation hopefully anywhere in KCK, JOCO or KCMO.

AM - I don't think government is our only option when it comes to public transportation funding. The philanthropic community has a lot of interest in seeing a more healthy Kansas City. I have good relationships with this community and would hope to be able to work with them and private business to offset some of the costs associated with developing a quality transit system that over time could sustain itself.



Mark Holland

MH - We are facing State and Federal funding cuts in numerous areas. Transit is one that is heavily dependent on this funding. It would be nice to say that we will not cut services, but the reality is that if this is not a national priority we will be hard pressed to replace the loss dollar for dollar.

NB - Yes. The transit system is currently under funded. The least we can do is to keep the funding going. I will take Wyandotte County from the welfare mentality to the understanding that it is our responsibility to fund basic transportation.

Section 2 – Funding

A. Currently local transit funding in Wyandotte County comes out of General Revenue Funds.

1. What local transit funding mechanisms do you think are best for Wyandotte County?

JW - I believe that there should be a percent sales tax especially in the number one tourist destination in the state of Kansas. There must be some benefit to the citizens of this county.

AM - I think there needs to be new ideas in addressing funding for transit. This is a long-standing problem for governments across the metropolitan area and nationally. As I said above, I don't think government is our only option when it comes to public transportation funding. The philanthropic community has a lot of interest in seeing a more healthy Kansas City. Public transportation promotes a healthier lifestyle. I would hope to be able to work with charitable organizations and private business to offset some of the costs associated with developing a quality transit system that over time could sustain itself.

MH - I think General Fund dollars are the best place for this fund.



Nathan Barnes

NB - A dedicated sales tax.

2. Would you consider a small county-wide transit tax to help sustain the transit system Please explain your reasoning.

JW - What I would consider is this, the bulk of the transit that is necessary at this moment involves the Legends area and transit for the dwindling population of the Northeast and other areas to get to the businesses in the West and the KU area. The specific serviced section of the community will bear the brunt

of the cost over the long run every day by using the service and paying standard fees. It is my opinion that, the business districts that benefit are the areas that should bear the bulk of any percent of tax increase, as the citizens would also be included in the revenue from the increase in purchases made in that area. If a separate tax district could be utilized to ensure that the small businesses of our general community are not harmed by this increase I would not be against it. But my mind is open, this is an issue that needs to be at the forefront of conversation, but I need more information.

We are taxed to support abatements for corporations but never given the opportunity to support ourselves. I do not believe the people would have a problem with this if they could see and use the benefit.

AM - I think any time we talk about taxing the people in WYCO that needs to be placed on a voting ballot.

MH - That would not be my first choice. When we unified the government 16 years ago, we brought a whole plethora of "special taxes" back into the General Budget. I understand the thought that it looks like more of a priority if it stands alone, but I think it is unnecessarily cumbersome in annual budgeting process.

NB - Yes. With decreasing federal funds it is the only choice.

B. Transit demand in Wyandotte County continues to increase. How and where would you get additional local transit funding to meet the increasing demand?

JW - Small percent tax approved by the citizenry.

AM - I think it is simple supply and demand. As transit demands increase our product will become better and ridership will increase and therefore revenue from riders will increase.

MH - I think this is where we need to be creative. It is very difficult to put the cost on users, who in our particular community are often the least able to support it. We need to continue tracking which lines are running at capacity and which ones are not. Are there areas where we can expand call for service? Are there areas where we can run smaller vehicles? We need to keep in mind the goal of transit is to get people from point A to point B, not just to run buses.

NB - I will get additional local transit funding to meet the increasing demand from Sales Taxes.

C. How will you work to increase Wyandotte County's level of transit funding

1. at the state level?

AM - On many occasions I have been successful in reaching across party lines and will use that experience to lobby for public transportation.

MH- We need to continue to lobby for State funding based on ridership and not on population. This is one of the biggest challenges. Transit money should follow the need, not the area.

2. at the federal level?

AM - Again I have good relationships with our elected officials on the federal level that will allow my voice to be heard for the people of Wyandotte County.

MH - We need to continue to engage with regional lobbying efforts. These collaborative conversations with the entire Metro area will yield far better results than if we go individually. I think the ongoing success of KCATA is the best hope Wyandotte County has for more funding.

State and Federal

JW - The very best that I can! Those who know how this should be handled will give me guidance and I will follow their lead. I am not a micromanager. I believe that people gain the knowledge, skills and abilities to do the job that they are hired to do. As a manager I would ensure that we had the proper staffing

with the proper tools to do the proper job and make the right decisions for the greater good of this community. It is my job to educate myself to their findings and support their position. In my opinion if I cannot trust them to do all of that, then I have failed as their leader. I would educate myself further, follow their lead since this would be their field and be support to good strong decisions on the local, state and federal levels.

NB -I plan to Lobby efforts at both state and federal.

Section 3 - Meeting increasing demand

A. Areas such as Rosedale, with very limited transit service, are trying to get additional service to meet the needs of its residents, many of which are transit dependent. What process should exist and/or what criteria should be met in order for residents to get new or expanded transit service?

JW - I would want more info and there is not enough time for me to make myself familiar enough to make a statement in section 3.

AM - I think we have many great opportunities in Rosedale specifically to improve transit in some very creative ways. We already have a great relationship with University of Kansas and I definitely think involving them in discussions about public transportation can help improve services for that area of WYCO. But do not forget that there are other areas that struggle to get their fair share of public transportation like the Turner area. Those residents tax dollars pay for that service yet they receive nothing for it at this time. This situation needs to be addressed as well.

MH - Again, creativity. Is there a way to add call for service? How can we partner through KCATA and the Jo, leveraging the proximity to KCMO and Johnson County?

NB - I must gain the true picture of the needs of the residents and then act on what is needed. Convene a meeting or meetings to address these individual concerns.

B. Route 101 will change to the Connex service later this year. Will you make sure that the upgrade in service level is enough to alleviate the current overcrowded conditions, without negatively impacting other services?

JW - I would want more info and there is not enough time for me to make myself familiar enough to make a statement in section 3.

AM - As to the details of the routes, we hire professional transit staff that make those decisions. These are not made at the Commission level. I have confidence in our staff and their ability to manage over crowding without impacting other services they provide.

MH - Absolutely. It looks like this improvement will make a huge difference.

NB - I pledge to aggressively pursue answers to address these concerns.

Section 4 - KCATA

A. What characteristics would you look for in making appointments to the KCATA Board of Commissioners?

JW - I believe that anyone appointed to any commission should have a genuine interest in the community. Not just be there to fill a seat. I am looking for constant results from appointed commissions. If nothing is being changed. Nothing is being done, because no one is perfect and there is always room for improvement and we should be finding it by listening to the citizens. They will surely tell us the problems and maybe even how to fix it if we listen.

AM - I believe that the characteristics of the current Board members are what we need to maintain in the future.

MH - We need collaborative, regionally minded individuals who have a heart for all the benefits transit brings to the people and the environment.

NB - Knowledge of the needs and a passion for those that depend on public transportation

B. Unified Government currently contracts with KCATA for only 90 days at a time. This policy gives a negative impression regarding the stability of the transit system in the county. What needs to happen to return to a full year contract like other municipalities?

JW - Committed long-term relationships based on honesty, respect and concern for the people, no exceptions. If we all care about the people that are riding on the transit including the drivers safety, comfort and health issues, there should be no room to have an issue. The bottom line is that as a business we all have to make money in order to maintain viability. But when the actual product is service and the people are the consumers of that product sometimes the measure for error and success becomes clouded by opinion, personality and politics-I think this is a mistake. I think we should set very specific service guidelines to service both the inside consumer and the outside consumer then let those perimeters establish a rock solid acceptable standard of service for us all. Including a long-term agreement with the KCATA so that the future and expectation for everyone is clear and the repercussions established, should those benchmarks not be met by either party. NO GAMES!

AM - This is a staff decision and I would need to consult with staff to better understand why we are contracting in this manner.

MH - This looks like a reasonable request. I would need to speak with our team at the city to see why this policy is in place.

NB - An open discussion. Most commissioners are not aware of this.

C. Would you consider contracting with KCATA for all fixed route services? Please explain why or why not?

JW - I love the idea and we will have a Transit friendly environment and I believe that KCATA will be the organization to ensure that, that happens. However, I cannot say yes or no to this question at this time since there would have to be in my opinion an opportunity for local business to play a part...potentially managed by KCATA in the growth of transit in the area. It was the mini bus of my childhood that was a privately held company that actually brought transit back to the grasp of those of us country bumpkins that lived in the west in the early 80's when there was no transit service available. I rode the minibus to and from school during a very specific period of my life. So...I cannot say that I would close small business access to All transit routes without looking further into what that would mean to this community and the potential of other small businesses relocating here to assist in transit service. My crystal ball is cloudy on that one, lol. Ask me again later after I do some research-my mind is always open to offer the best service possible to humanity.

AM - Again, this is a staff decision and I would need to consult with staff before making any changes.

MH - With the State and Federal spending cuts, I don't think we can take anything off the table. This would have serious considerations for our UG employees and I would not do anything without seeking assurances about their future. Again, we need to be creative in how we serve the community.

NB - Once all of the information is presented to the Unified Government I would review the pros and cons of the issue and make a decision. I do believe that the current bus system in Wyandotte County should play some part in that system.

Section 5 - Creating a transit-friendly environment

What non-financial actions can be taken to create a more transit-friendly environment in

1. Kansas City, Kansas?

MH - We are looking at residential developments in and around the new 7th street transit center downtown. The more we can foster “transit friendly” development and encourage growth nearby, the better. We are also looking for a major redevelopment at Indian Springs around the new transit center there. I think the strategic location of this center automatically makes Indian Springs a new kind of destination.

NB - Regular updates to the powers that be.

2. Village West?

MH - Coordinating routes with businesses and restaurants to make sure the buses are running at the right times for opening and closing. This makes the use of transit a more organic, and less onerous option for the employee.

NB - Make the case for why they should be a part of the discussions and the solution.

KCK and Village West

JW- Retraining in proper customer service and the emphasis on positive outcomes for the customers experience while in transit care. Service is a product. It must be fine tuned constantly to ensure good relationships and long-term viability of business ventures. Especially when the effects are of detriment to healthy lifestyles and a healthy planet. Many times the bus driver will be the only connection to the welfare of some riders. They need to be empowered to be safe consumers of their own product but have the authority to demand change to benefit the entire experience. I think answering the needs of the drivers, mechanics and service vendors of the buses will alleviate stressors that can cause frustration with a frustrated public.

AM - I currently use our transit system on occasion and I find it to be a very friendly environment. However, I am sure there are always ways to improve and in order to know how to create a “more” friendly environment we need to ask the people using the current system on a regular basis.