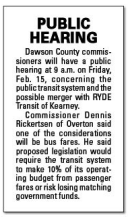

PUBLIC HEARING

Dawson County commissioners will have a public hearing at 9 a.m. on Friday, Feb. 15, concerning the public transit system and the possible merger with RYDE Transit of Kearney.

Commissioner Dennis Rickertsen of Overton said one of the considerations will be bus fares. He said proposed legislation would require the transit system to make 10% of its operating budget from passenger fares or risk losing matching government funds.

LEXINGTON—Dawson County commissioners don't want to get locked into paying a tower lease fee for a regional microwave radio network when some adjacent counties will receive the benefits of the network at no cost.

The large microwave system is designed to eventually bring data connection into every 911 center in the state, allowing individual centers to share radio systems, telephone switches and large data files while eliminating multiple phone lines and recurring connection costs.

Panhandle counties are already running on the first phase of the network, said Pat Gerdes, director for the Region 15 Emergency Management Association in south central Nebraska.

Gerdes addressed Dawson County board members during their regular bimonthly meeting on Friday, asking that they help the system to continue being built toward the east by agreeing to be the leasing agent for space on a KRVN radio tower south of Lexington.

The cost, $831 per month, would be covered by Homeland Security grant funds for at least the first year and possibly into the second.

But the ongoing responsibility for the lease would fall back on Dawson County.

Gerdes said some other counties have received donated space for the microwave dish equipment, including on grain elevators, water towers or publicly owned towers.

In Dawson County's situation, the KRVN tower is the viable option because of the required

weight load and height, he said.

The plan is to work toward all counties sharing the cost should grant funding be discontinued, Gerdes said, although there is no guarantee now.

And benefits to the county may not be seen for awhile.

“Still,” Gerdes said, “it’s paramount that all counties in south central Nebraska be on board for the expansion of the network to move across the state.”

Dawson County’s participation is the determining factor in keeping the system going, he said.

Commissioners agreed they don’t want to stop progress but they also don’t want residents to be footing the entire bill when other counties have no cost but could still reap the benefits.

Gerdes will return to the board with an annual contract proposal for the KRVN tower lease, allowing Dawson County commissioners to withdraw should grant money run out.

In other action, commissioners opened three bids for fiber optic Internet service at the courthouse and sheriff’s office.

The board awarded the contract to Charter Communications for 20mg service at a rate of $551 per month with a $250 installation fee.

Other bids were received from Nebraska Link for $722 monthly and from Century Link for $4,370 for similar bandwidth.

In other business, the county board:

received a road department update from superintendent Jon Mooberry. The public hearing for the one- and six-year road plan is set for March 1 during the regular bimonthly board meeting.

authorized a contract with Client-Server Technology Group of Omaha for servicing the computer network at the sheriff's office and renewed a contract with VVS Inc. for food services at the detention center.

VVS has provided the jail food service since 1993. Over the 20-year period, the charge for food per day per inmate has risen from $4.69 in 1993 to $5.73 in 2013.

accepted the resignation of Derek Mitchell as public defender effective April 1. The county will seek a replacement to fulfill the remainder of Mitchell's term through 2014.

agreed not to change the employee funeral leave allowance from two hours to four hours. Employees are allowed three days of grievance time for certain family members and two hours of funeral leave for others.

Following discussion that involved the correlation with paid time off, commissioners decided PTO time could be used for longer funeral requests with prior approval by the department head.

reviewed an update from human resources consultant Jay Edwards on the process of developing an HR position for the county. Edwards had interviewed elected and appointed officials, contacted 10 other counties of similar size and reviewed policy manuals.

He said there are opportunities for improvement but the county does not have any huge human resources issues. His plan is expected to be complete by Feb. 20.

looked at a quarterly health insurance update presented by Dan Schwartzkopf of the Krull Agency.

Schwartzkopf said aggregate claims paid for 147 enrollees over the past six months total $688,000 or an 86.7% loss ratio. That trend is higher than normal, he said, but should even out with slower activity in January and February.