



## MINUTES of 02/20/2014 ADVISORY BOARD MEETING

### ATTENDANCE

#### Name

#### Representing

#### PRESENT

William Lehtola  
Jarrett Conner  
Mark Binnall  
Kelly Burke  
Dennis Lipka  
John Ostrosky  
David Schiller  
Robert Spain

Spencer  
Worcester  
Auburn  
Northborough  
Holden  
Shrewsbury  
Charlton  
Millbury

#### ABSENT

Doug Belanger  
Leon Gaumond Jr.  
Alyssa Graveson  
Rudy Heller  
Timothy McInerney  
Kevin Mizikar  
Daniel Morgado  
Michael Pantos  
Michael Ward

Leicester  
West Boylston  
Douglas  
Brookfield  
Grafton  
Grafton  
Shrewsbury  
Rutland  
Clinton

1. Chairman Lehtola called the meeting to order at 8:36 a.m.
2. **Attendance**

### 3. Acceptance of Minutes

- Mr. Lehtola asked for a motion to accept the minutes of January 20, 2014.
- Mr. Ostrosky asked that an amendment be added to the January minutes in regards to the item of comment he made in reference to route 15 being 5 minutes ahead of schedule. Mr. Ostrosky clarified that he did appear at customer service and filed a verbal complaint about the route issue stated above and expressed in the January business from the Board.
- **Mr. Schiller made the motion and Mr. Binnall seconded.** All board members voted in favor. The motion was accepted.

### 4. Administrator Report

Mr. O'Neil provided overviews and updates on the following topics: 40 Quinsigamond Ave, electric buses, budget, customer service and comprehensive service analysis.

- Mr. O'Neil introduced Ms. Everett, Esq. from the law firm of Koplemen and Paige, the firm handling negotiations between NSTAR and the WRTA. Ms. Everett explained there was one (1) pending item - an easement issue for the property at 40 Quinsigamond Ave, and they are awaiting a written response regarding the access of this easement location. She fully expects to have the escrow closed on the 28th of February. She feels all documents, including the pending easement issue, will be finalized for the recording on March 5, 2014.
- Mr. O'Neil confirmed for the board the administration acquired its covenant not to sue and that the plans for the new maintenance and operations facility at 40 Quinsigamond Ave. are at the 30% design stage. Mr. O'Neil briefed the board on the facilities layout. Mr. O'Neil noted specifically the heated storage area that would contain the entire fleet as well as the fueling station for diesel. The unleaded gasoline and additional electric charging station, if purchased through a pending grant, would be located outside in the back of the facility. Mr. O'Neil assured the board that all permits & codes are being met in regards to fueling and the storage of fuel for the facility. Mr. O'Neil further explained the proposed spacing for an administrative office, drivers lounge and fitness room as well as two conferences rooms, one for use by the community at large.
- Mr. O'Neil recapped the financial picture of the new maintenance and operations facility by stating that \$12 million is allocated for environmental cleanup and is being provided by the state, \$39 million from the Federal Transit Administration is being applied to the construction of the building and additional funds from the sale of Grove St. will be available should that be necessary.
- Mr. O'Neil updated the board on the completion of the selection of a cm at risk firm for the 40 Quinsigamond Ave Project. The following firms were interviewed: Consigli, Gilbane, and Skanska. Skanska was the choice made by the administration based on the

following factors: past construction of similar maintenance facilities, good team work, and chemistry between Skanska and STV. Mr. O'Neil advised the board of upcoming negotiations with representatives from Skanska regarding cost and timelines. The following timeline was given to the board: early lead packages will go out late spring to early summer and site work should start early March while the design plan should be completed by August of 2014 with final completion of the facility set for early 2016.

- Mr. Connor commented that the building committee is open to having another meeting as progress starts to move forward. Mr. Lehtola acknowledged this. No meeting date has been set at this time.
- Mr. O'Neil next discussed the electric buses. He explained there have been issues of buses not charging properly owing to problems with snow, particularly heavy wet snow. He indicated engineers from Proterra are working on a couple of solutions one of which has been implemented and appears to be working. The other solution is about 4-6 weeks away.
- Mr. O'Neil stated that the need to correct this problem has wider implications for Proterra as it will affect their future sales in the Midwestern United States, as well as in Canada where heavy snow is a greater factor. As discussed previously, Proterra's sales goals are to increase their market share in those regions in 2014. Mr. Carney stated that in order to keep the scheduling and efficiency, a contingency bus is swapped for an electric bus but this occurrence is not causing any significant increase in fuel costs or decrease in savings because of electric buses not in use. Mr. O'Neil indicated the electric buses accounted for 31,200 miles for five months and are saving \$28,000 in diesel costs. Mr. O'Neil stated that he will update the board when a permanent solution has been worked out.
- Mr. O'Neil introduced Mr. Coyne who gave a quick overview of the budget process for the fiscal years 2014 and 2015. The schedule for review for both the budget committee and the advisory board are as follows: budget committee review and recommendation is expected to be completed sometime at the end of March 2014, WRTA Advisory Board vote is expected at the April 2014 meeting and submission to Boston is June 2014.
- Mr. Coyne also reviewed a short list of assumptions in regards to the following areas. For complete details this summary report can be viewed by clicking the following link.  
[Budget Schedule and Assumptions Feb 2014.pdf](#)
- Mr. Conner expressed his enthusiasm regarding forward funding and acknowledged the great work done by Mr. O'Neil and MARTA for making this a reality for all the RTAs. Mr. Conner felt this change was of a huge value and that building a budget from this point forward will mean living within that budget. Mr. O'Neil then reminded the board that the \$1.9 million of prior year debt was eliminated as part of the forward funding initiative.
- Mr. Binnall asked if there would be any more money budgeted for PBSI. Mr. O'Neil replied that there are no higher levels of spending for PBSI; however there are no cuts

either.

- Mr. O'Neil spoke about the past and present changes to customer service, specifically in regards to customer feedback. Mr. O'Neil explained with the move to Foster Street an increase in access to service has occurred as well as the need for an internal change has been recognized. To this end, we have now set up a new protocol for reporting, accounting and tracking customer feedback on all levels. We've also instituted a policy of the 24 to 48 hour turnaround for first response on all feedback. This collaborated effort is due to the involvement of Mr. Hamman, Mr. Carney, and Mr. Delage and the implementation of a new software called "Zendesk".
- Mr. O'Neil introduced Mr. Hamman who gave the board an overview of how the new software works through the ticketing process. His presentation included an instructional sample ticket and the various internal tracking and logging procedures. Mr. Hamman explained the system is able to interface with the current phone system, our website, and both Facebook and Twitter accounts for messaging and retrieval. The system also allows for customized internal reports as well as real time analysis of ticket creation and closure. The system can be expanded at additional cost, but expansion measures are not the emphasis at this point as the system has only been in place for the last two weeks.
- Mr. O'Neil explained that the supervision of the employees, reports, and if necessary, individual tickets would be done by Mr. Delage and that the emphasis is on cross training employees within the customer service team base. Mr. Hamman noted some of the features that proved to be presently valuable are the ticket sharing, as some requests require video documentation along with appropriate responses from other individuals in other departments and the system's ability to automatically send out prescribed messages for specific events. Mr. O'Neil stated that the system looks promising and that they will continue to exercise the options that will best fit with the needs of the company.
- Mr. Lehtola asked if the WRTA could be more proactive with the use of the website, Facebook, and specifically texting in regards to street conditions and other issues not necessarily related to the weather as that is covered by the weather alert text function. Mr. O'Neil replied that yes the Zendesk software would enable us to push out more messages across various social media.
- Mr. O'Neil introduced Mr. Carney who approached the board for consideration of having a paper feedback response ticket. He explained that personnel at the customer service window do not have a dedicated computer or staff to handle verbally given feedback. The handing out of the ticket would give the customer information on how to record their feedback.
- The board members discussed the ticket idea and recommended that the administration install a dedicated phone line to be used by the customer to directly give feedback and comments. Mr. Schiller felt that the ticket would not result in the complete and proper tracking of feedback and that the software invested in would be better serviced by this method. Mr. Schiller and Mr. Spain stated that if a person comes to the hub to formally

submit a comment, they should be addressed formally in return and, not do so, in his opinion, indirectly implies the company does not care about their customers.

- Mr. O’Neil introduced Mr. Church to provide an update on metrics used by the WRTA to measure performance.
- Mr. Church summarized the performance metrics and service standards for the months of October, November, and December 2013. The purpose of this was to define, relate, and explain how this data analysis affects WRTA policy and how these metrics are tied to the WRTA’s Service Standards and Performance Measures. The details of this report can be reviewed by clicking on the following link. [2.20.14 Advisory Board – 3 month Service Evaluation.pdf](#)
- Mr. Church spoke on specific topics of passenger per revenue hour, passenger per revenue mile, on-time performance, and ridership. The first of which was passengers per revenue hour and its definition as “the average number of passengers carried by the fixed route service for each revenue hour operated.” Overall analysis is that during the last three (3) months of 2013, passenger per revenue hour was down slightly from the same period in 2012. Mr. Church went on to note that this decrease is mostly due to the new service that was added to the system in CY 2013.
- The second topic was passengers per revenue mile and its definition is “the average number of passengers carried by fixed route service for each revenue mile traveled.” Overall analysis was the last three (3) months of 2013, passengers per revenue mile was down slightly from the same period in 2012. This is because the WRTA added new service including midnight service and three (3) new routes to the system in CY 2013. Mr. Church went on to explain that, as with the passenger per revenue hour, when new services are added more revenue miles are immediately added to the system, but ridership generally grows more slowly, thus causing passengers’ counts to be lower until ridership catches up.
- Both passengers per mile and passengers per hour relate to WRTA policy because they are the base measurement for a route’s performance. Further, these measures relate to safety and security and WRTA fleet standards regarding maintenance costs. This information is important because the more passengers a route carries, the more effective and productive that route is. This, in turn, provides a higher cost to benefit ratio for route and the WRTA system as a whole.
- Mr. Church continued with “on-time performance” which was defined as “the percentage of fixed route vehicles by route that reach their assigned time points on time in the system.” Overall analysis is that for the last three (3) months of 2013 performance was slightly lower than the last three (3) months of 2012. However, weekday and Sunday on-time performance during this period was up in 2013, compared to 2012. This information is important because on-time performance measures scheduling adherence and provides passengers with consistent reliability and dependable service.

- The last topic “ridership” was defined as “the number of passengers who board a WRTA fixed route vehicle for unlinked passenger trips.” Overall analysis was ridership for the last three (3) months of 2013 was higher than the last three (3) months of 2012, showing that more passenger trips were being made on the system. This information helps with evaluating our service quality standards, economic and productivity standards, as well as showing increases and frequency measures on specific routes.
- Mr. Schiller asked if adding three (3) minutes to the route would help with on-time performance and requested a comprehensive explanation. Ms. Blunt addressed the board and explained that if three (3) minutes were added to each run, the net effect would be an increase in frequency, a decrease in the overall number of runs per day, and we would move further away from clock headway. As an example, she noted that each run could change from thirty (30) minutes to thirty-three (33) minutes, which increases the amount of time between runs, and could end up eliminating a run for the whole day. It would also make it harder to match up connecting times between buses.
- Mr. Spain noted that on-time numbers are variable due to factors like weather, charger problems, road work and other occurrences and that perhaps looking at the data over several years may be more appropriate.
- Ms. Blunt agreed that trending for comparison may better service the purpose Mr. Spain is looking for but as of now there is not enough data to complete a measurement due to the fact that APC data is only available back to last year.
- Mr. O'Neil advised the board that they will continue to receive reports every quarter.
- Mr. O'Neil reported to the board that he had submitted via their request his self-evaluation form. Mr. Lipka explained to the board the process and timing on the issue of the administrator's contract. The personnel committee will meet March 6, 2014 to review the administrator's self-evaluation and develop an evaluation as well as prepare a recommendation for the board. The March advisory board meeting would be for public evaluation and the April advisory board meeting for approval by the board.

## **5. Business from the Board**

- Mr. Binnall asked about the ridership on the midnight service and Mr. Lehtola commented that the numbers would be reviewed at the next board meeting.
- Mr. Ostrosky spoke about route 15 and the experience he had last week with the numerous WRTA buses that ride the regular fixed route. He stated that his bus was late due to weather - the 7:20 a.m. leaving Southgate was about 40 minutes late and he tried to flag down one of the smaller WRTA buses but to no avail. Also, he recommended that the website publish that fixed route buses are full scale buses and if smaller busses are substituted on fixed routes that factor should be announced throughout all media outlets.

- Mr. Carney suggested that a window sign could be placed in the smaller buses.
- Mr. Connor and the board members discussed how to handle when a driver is running hot. They commented on the need for a feedback loop and bell or text alert system so as to stop the process along the route itself as opposed to catching this after a run or after someone has complained.
- Mr. O’Neil explained that real time information comes to dispatcher and then the dispatcher alerts the driver. The ability to time point things is now available.

## **6. Business from the Public**

- Ms. Hart asked why there were no schedules at City Hall or the Hub in regards to the new community services. She felt that not having paper schedules was self defeating and it showed a lack of concern for those not in the technology loop with smart phones .
- Ms. Hart’s question prompted numerous comments in regards to the variety of mediums for getting information out and advertising in general. The new town services are being promoted in the towns as they service mainly in the individual towns. The hub’s customer service has the schedules for these routes and they can be requested. City Hall will get a delivery of the town schedules next week by CMRPC and both the lobby TV television screens and the WRTA website have information on these routes. Also, outreach in the towns has been extended with business meetings and the adoption of a kiosk in Southbridge library.
- Mr. Provost commented that yesterday regarding route 19 at 9:10 a.m. he went to the safest place closest to the Franklin Street bus shelter and tried to flag down the bus. The driver did not pick him up. He also asked if solar panels would be placed on the roof of the new facility and/or if the zone destination would allow for growing food or plants on the roof of the facility.
- Mr. O’Neil responded that solar maybe an option and that there was no confirmation on farm zoning. Mr. Carney stated that they would look into the missed pick up as that should not happen given the snow conditions.
- Mr. O’Neil introduced Mr. O’Day from Elder Bus who explain the success of the expanded service they have in the towns of Southbridge, Spencer, Sturbridge and Webster. Mr. O’Day stated that for this program his general restrictions were lifted to accommodate a work-related transportation based service. As many of the RTAs are looking to reach out and expand public transportation this program fit’s a needed niche market and runs at a very manageable cost. The fuel on average for this program runs about \$6,000 to \$7,000 dollars per year.
- Mr. O’Day stated the service grew by word of mouth working with the social service

agencies that deal with persons needing transportation to get to work. The original goal of 5% or seventy-five (75) rides has been exceeded as we are now averaging two hundred (200) per month throughout the system and continue to grow.

## **7. Adjournment**

- **Mr. Conner motion to adjourn and Mr. Binnall seconded. All voted in favor and the motion to adjourn accepted** the meeting adjourned at 10:28 a.m.

## **8. Next Meeting Date**

- The next board meeting will be on March 20, 2014 at 8:30 a.m. located at the Hub 60 Foster Street Worcester, MA 01608 3<sup>rd</sup> floor.