



## MINUTES of 05/15/2014 ADVISORY BOARD MEETING

### ATTENDANCE

<u>Name</u>	<u>Representing</u>
<b><u>PRESENT</u></b>	
William Lehtola	Spencer
Doug Belanger	Leicester
Mark Binnall	Auburn
Kelly Burke	Northborough
Jarrett Conner	Worcester
Dennis Lipka	Holden
John Ostrosky	Shrewsbury
Robert Spain	Millbury
<b><u>ABSENT</u></b>	
Leon Gaumond Jr.	West Boylston
Alyssa Graveson	Douglas
Rudy Heller	Brookfield
Timothy McInerney	Grafton
Kevin Mizikar	Grafton
Daniel Morgado	Shrewsbury
David Schiller	Charlton
Michael Pantos	Rutland
Michael Ward	Clinton

1. Chairman Lehtola called the meeting to order at 8:32 a.m.

2. **Attendance**

### 3. Acceptance of Minutes

- Mr. Lehtola asked for a motion to accept the minutes of April 17, 2014.
- **Motion: To accept the minutes of April 17, 2014.**
- **Mr. Belanger made the motion and Mr. Spain seconded. All voted in favor and the motion was accepted.**
- Mr. Lipka joined the meeting at 8:36 a.m.

### 4. Business from the Public

Mr. Lehtola welcomed all members of the public to participate in the public discussion of their regular monthly board meetings, held on the third Thursday of every month, at 8:30 a.m. at the hub.

- Ms. Fuller thanked the board for their time and research regarding the information related to the seven (7) proposed service changes. Ms. Fuller stated the following proposed changes reflected good judgment and were well founded. Ms. Fuller was sorry to hear the shouting between some of the people attending the public meetings on Monday, May 12, 2014. Ms. Fuller suggested a follow-up regarding the cleaning of the buses, specifically concerning the main routes.
- Mr. Carney replied that he has continued to monitor the cleanliness of the buses and his staff has been diligent in regards to picking up after the ridership. Mr. Carney also mentioned riders are allowed to bring coffee cups onto the bus and therefore spills may be a continuing issue. Mr. Carney stated they will continue to monitor the situation.
- Mr. Horton made a formal apology to Mr. Carney and Mr. Church for losing his temper at the public meeting on Monday. Mr. Horton also notified the board of a group called the “Worcester Transit Coalition” and he would appreciate this group being officially part of the community groups consulted as well as being notified of all public meetings and hearings in regards to the WRTA. Mr. Horton also acknowledged at the meeting on Monday, the majority of issues discussed were not related to the specific service changes being presented. The group was concerned with any major changes occurring before the Compressive Service Report was completed and having their input taken into consideration.
- Mr. Lehtola then asked Mr. O’Neil if he was aware of the Worcester Transit Coalition. Mr. O’Neil responded he was and that he meets with representatives from Neighbor to Neighbor and some of those people also represent the Worcester Transit Coalition on occasion.

- Mr. Provost commented on the extreme frustration vented by the people at the meeting towards CMRPC and the WRTA administration, stems from what he feels is a lack of clear communication, along with two specific issues. The first issue being the pulsing out from the hub of specific routes likes 30 and 31, along with a pulse out within five minutes leaving and returning down Main Street from the hub. The second issue being the bus announcements needing to be simpler. Mr. Provost explained to the board the announcement gives the bus number, then the route, and then the bay number. He recommended they give only the route number and then the bay number.
- Mr. Lehtola expressed his sympathy with the limited options that may present themselves due to the existing pulse out schedule; however these are done to facilitate the necessary timing of those routes. In regards to the announcement system, Mr. O'Neil explained the current announcement system is set up to give the most information, given all of the variables which include the usage of the bus number. This information was requested by some of the WRTA riders.
- Ms. Hart suggested meetings should be at 12 p.m. and/or 5:30 p.m. at a central meeting place such as City Hall or Union Station. In her opinion, these times would better facilitate those who take the bus as well as those who work.
- Board members then discussed various ways to communicate with the public in regards to meetings, and most agreed the suggested times should be taken into consideration. Members discussed the importance of notices on the buses as well as for any service changes with alternative route options to be listed. It was generally accepted by the board the angry public opinion expressed at the public meeting was mainly about communication issues and not specifically the seven (7) changes. Mr O'Neil agreed.
- Mr. O'Neil expressed his concern for the apparent miscommunication over the directed intentions of the specific purpose of the public meeting. Mr. O'Neil advised the board the concerns expressed by those in attendance at the two public meetings represent a small fraction of the overall WRTA ridership. He agreed with the board a general public hearing may help to relieve previous frustrations and improve communications in the future.
- In an effort to clarify the process underway for obtaining feedback on future routes adjustments/changes, Mr. O'Neil explained the WRTA is one of ten (10) regional transit authorities initiating a review of their entire system. As part of this process, the public will be involved in voicing concerns they have with the present system in addition to offering ideas on changes. URS, the consultant hired by the regional transit agencies, and CMRPC would hold public meetings in regards to transit needs, while a survey would be issued for additional focus. From this input, a report would be generated from URS and the administration would formulate a series of recommendations. These recommendations would be presented to the board and the public for further input, and then adjusted if needed and implemented once approved by the board.
- Mr. O'Neil gave an immediate example of how the public response is taken into

consideration. He explained public input concerning the elimination of Route 24A prompted its further continuance. Mr. O’Neil stated the June 2014 round of changes were part of a series over the past 9 months, again with input from the public. These efforts have been done with the use of public feedback and data from our system.

- Mr. O’Neil noted that, despite the uproar, the WRTA continues to steadily increase its ridership; has implemented a defined customer feedback response system, and has expanded its lines of communication more so than the previous administration. We have embraced social media outlets; built up our presence on the web, and added additional information at the Hub, on board the buses and at the shelters. Mr. O’Neil stated posting on the City of Worcester website was noteworthy and he would follow-up with the appropriate folks at city hall to determine if/when we could post to its website. Mr. O’Neil confirmed the future is in our continuation to fine-tune the system with the funds available, as directed under the board’s guidelines.
- Mr. Belanger noted in many ways the WRTA is a victim of the past administrations financial constraints and the logistical necessities of running a transit system. He suggested moving forward the administration communicate its long-term goals and vision to the public directly, as this may help facilitate focusing on the future as opposed to the past.
- Mr. Connor commented on now the administration’s ability to use the data and public input to present these changes appears to be well thought out.

## 5. Administrator Report

Mr. O’Neil then introduced Mr. Church, who explained to the board the recommended service changes (to take place on June 28, 2014) made after the public hearing and their specific recommendations. To review the power point presentation page with the adjustment details click on the link [Revised Proposed Fixed Route Service Changes for June 2014 page](#).

### Weekday Service Changes

**Route 8** – Adjust all inbound schedule times to accommodate electric bus re-charging

**Route 11A** – Suspend service for summer months

**Route 18** – Suspend service for summer months

**Route 24A** – Maintain service as it exists

### Saturday and Sunday Service Changes

**Routes 7 and 19** – Add schedule time to midday trips to maintain on-time performance

**Route 12** – Elimination of route; Allocate resources into existing WRTA routes as follows:

- Saturdays – Increase start times on Routes 1 and 2; provide a new inbound trip at end of service on Route 2 and provide evening service on Route 4 to the Shoppes at Blackstone Valley

- Sundays – Provide additional trips on Routes 5 and 27; add two additional evening inbound trips on Route 23
- Mr. O’Neil asked for a vote from the board to accept and enact the changes proposed.
- **Motion: The Worcester Regional Transit Authority's Advisory Board accepts to enact the changes made to the initial service changes recommendation.**
- **Mr. Spain made the motion and Mr. Binnall seconded. All voted in favor and the motion was accepted.**
- Mr. O’Neil addressed the board concerning the FY’14 and FY’15 budgets. He gave the following overview for the FY’14. The WRTA saw increases in its ridership and new services using MBTA assessment monies from the towns of Grafton, Northbridge, Paxton, and Westborough, which also increased membership to the WRTA board. We have six all electric buses now in service and our robust customer service software tracks customer comments and complaints. We have acquired the site at 42 Quinsigamond Ave for the purpose of a new Maintenance and Operations facility and we will be starting construction in June 2014. This has been a most productive year.

Mr. Coyne went through an overview of the FY’14 and FY’15 budgets. Details of these budgets are available by clicking on the following links. [FY’14 Consolidated Budget](#) and [FY’15 Consolidated Budget](#). The cover letter to the board from Mr. O’Neil can be viewed by clicking the link [FY’15 Budget Letter 5.15.14](#).

- Mr. Coyne reviewed the approval of the budgets. The original FY’14 budget was approved by the full board May 16, 2013 and the revised FY’14 budget was approved by the Audit and Finance Committee on April 29, 2014. FY’14 overview shows total expenses were adjusted up by 1.5% or \$333,626 due to the following:
  - New Service: Hub Loop, Westborough, Grafton, Northbridge, Paxton
  - Elder Bus service not implemented
  - Capital Project funded through operations: Hub Location System, Wrap Vans, Wrap battery Packs
  - Increase pension funding

Total Revenue was down by 1.5% or \$57,292 due to the following:

- Increases in the use of discounted fares
- Transit Advertising & Sale of Surplus Equipment higher than budget

Federal Operating Assistance has a slight increase due to additional New Freedom funds but also the elimination of Section 5311 Rural Route funding.

Net Cost of Service increase \$369k or 2.7%

- Local Assessments increased due to new fully funded community services
- State Contract Assistance increased due to Commonwealth’s gas tax increase

The budget for FY'14 is \$22,493,015.

- Mr. Belanger asked if the one time only revenues should be included within the budget. Mr. O'Neil explained they are not worried about revenue not being realized, but the point is well taken. Capital projects will use capital dollars and not operational dollars.
- **Motion: The Audit and Finance Committee having met with the administration and reviewed the proposed budget as present by the administration, recommends the Worcester Regional Transit Authority's Advisory Board approve the revised FY'14 budget in the amount of \$22,493,015.**
- **Mr. Lipka made the motion and Mr. Belanger seconded. All voted in favor and the motion was accepted.**
- FY'15 overview shows total expenses were increased by \$1,201,347 or 5.3% due to the following:
  - Full year of new fixed route and demand response service
  - Wage progression, plus negotiated union increases-Fringe follows
  - Large increases in Vehicle and Workman's Comp Insurance
  - Focus on Customer Service
  - Information Technology

Total Revenue shows \$52,287 or 1.4% decrease due to the following:

- Farebox revenue decreasing, one-day passes increasing
- Increase Community Transit Grants
- Reduced surplus equipment available for sale

Decrease of Federal Operating Assistance of \$528k or 10.3% due primarily to reduced New Freedom and Preventive Maintenance funding.

Eliminate the annual Reserve for Extraordinary Expense accrual

Net Cost of Service Funding increase of \$1.668m or 12.1%

- State Contract Assistance increased due to Commonwealth's gas tax
- Local Assessments increased 2.5% plus fully funded new services

The budget for FY'15 is \$23,694,363.

- Mr. Binnall asked what the FY'15 budget amount is and if consideration can be given to expanding the PBSI service from 9 p.m. to 12 midnight Mr. Coyne replied the budget is 23,694,363, and Mr. O'Neil replied PBSI will see some changes and the administration has noted his request.
- **Motion: The Audit and Finance Committee having met with the administration and**

**reviewed the proposed budget as present by the administration, recommends the Worcester Regional Transit Authority's Advisory Board approve the FY'15 budget in the amount of \$23,694,363.**

- **Mr. Lipka made the motion and Mr. Belanger seconded. All voted in favor and the motion was accepted.**
- Mr. O'Neil asked the board to vote to allow the administration to issue a request for proposal regarding auditing services for FY'15. He explained this is necessary to comply with the State's request. He informed the board McCarthy, Hargrave & Co. would continue with audit for FY'14.
- **Motion: The Worcester Regional Transit Authority's Advisory Board authorizes the administrator to advertise a request for proposals for auditing services.**
- **Mr. Lipka made the motion and Mr. Belanger seconded. All voted in favor and the motion was accepted.**
- Mr. O'Neil gave the board an update on the permits and community progress regarding the Quinsigamond Ave. project. Mr. O'Neil explained he will meet with the Zoning Board of Appeals in regards to the special permits needed for items such as storage of flammable liquids and gases, landscape buffer and screening, while the Planning Board meeting is set for early June in regards to site plan approval. Mr. O'Neil noted the facility has an official address of 42 Quinsigamond Ave. Renderings of the site and building were exhibited for review to the board members and those attending the public meeting.
- Mr. O'Neil spoke about the positive response from the public meetings being held in the neighborhood regarding the proposed maintenance and operations facility. He also told the board what he explained at the meeting regarding the pending site construction process. In June, trailers are expected on site along with exploratory work on the characteristics of the soil. This soil work will make available more information and assist potential contractors with any additional considerations regarding characteristics of the soil prior to soil removal. Then the removal of trees and a complete clearing of the site will be done. Mr. O'Neil stated during these changes the site may omit odors; however perimeter monitors will be installed to monitor this and a hotline number will be provided to the public should it have any questions or concerns. Mr. O'Neil explained at the recent neighborhood meeting safety is the number one priority and it is important children in the neighborhood stay off the site, especially as the project is started.
- Mr. O'Neil informed the board the groundbreaking would be on June 6, 2014 at 10 a.m. at the site. All are welcome to attend.
- Mr. O'Neil informed the board the WRTA, as part of its long term strategic planning, will be addressing the issue of fare increases. We will be taking into consideration the recommendations of URS comprehensive service report when approaching this issue.

Mr. O’Neil stated: “The WRTA has no immediate intention of increasing fares in 2014, nor does it seem likely for 2015 budgeted year.” He explained the process for a recommendation takes into consideration many factors, including ridership economic demographics, existing levels of fine-tuning service, the board’s directive on future growth in relation to new services, existing and overall funding determinations, as well as need/creation for new service.

- Given these and other factors, recommendations from the report can better-define options and assist with the viable objectives necessary to approach a comprehensive and balanced determination. He further explained the administration fully realizes farebox revenue remains the smaller portion of our revenue stream, but it is also vital to growth moving into the next decade. Mr. O’Neil stated again: “The WRTA has no immediate intention of increasing fares in 2014 nor does it seem likely for 2015 budgeted year.” When and if this comes to pass, the administration will follow the process for all changes and this will include open public meetings.
- The monthly operations report, which outlines the performance measures for the WRTA, can be viewed at the following link [April 2014 Monthly Operations Report](#).

## **6. Business from the Board**

- Mr. Ostrosky voiced concerns regarding the approach options discussed in the past by the board concerning farebox increases. Mr. Ostrosky felt a prolonged approach, which would delay increases by multiple years, may rock the ridership when and if an increase is put into place. He also noted the MBTA’s approach of frequent smaller increases can be bothersome to the public as it inches up every year (by a dime as an example).
- Mr. O’Neil replied they are talking about alternative approaches and there is no magic number to settle on. The current objective is to talk sooner thereby giving our ridership time to make any adjustments, should the need come to pass. Mr. O’Neil explained aside from the comprehensive service report, we may benefit from having a consultant look at things but this would all be done as we move closer to really focusing on this issue.
- Mr. Lipka spoke in regards to the past efforts for fare increases and how they were made against the backdrop of being substantially underfunded by the state. This led to the two-fold approach of reduction in service alongside a fare increase. Mr. Lipka noted today the WRTA is in a different direction moving forward, but he cautioned the administration that pending short-term costs of the new facility being built vs. the benefits of the long-term savings, should be calculated as well.
- Mr. Conner voiced his opinion about fare increases as being part of a last resort. He emphasized improving ridership and using the comprehensive service report as a means to determine how to make our system overall more efficient.

## **7. Adjournment**

- **Mr. Belanger motion to adjourn and Mr. Binnall seconded. All voted in favor and the motion to adjourn accepted** the meeting adjourned at 9:55 a.m.

## **8. Next Meeting Date**

- The next board meeting will be on June 19, 2014 at 8:30 a.m. located at the Hub 60 Foster Street Worcester, MA 01608 3<sup>rd</sup> floor.