



## MINUTES of 7/18/2013 ADVISORY BOARD MEETING

### ATTENDANCE

**Name**

**Representing**

**PRESENT**

William Lehtola  
David Schiller  
Jarrett Conner  
Mark Binnall  
John Ostrosky  
Kelly Burke  
Leon Gaumond Jr.  
Michael Ward  
Dennis Lipka  
Doug Belanger

Spencer  
Charlton  
Worcester  
Auburn  
Shrewsbury  
Northborough  
West Boylston  
Clinton  
Holden  
Leicester

**ABSENT**

Alyssa Graveson  
Timothy McInerney  
Kevin Mizikar  
Michael Pantos  
Daniel Morgado  
Michael O'Brien

Douglas  
Grafton  
Grafton  
Rutland  
Shrewsbury  
Worcester

1. Chairman Lehtola called the meeting to order at 8:39 a.m.
2. **Attendance**

### 3. Acceptance of Minutes

- Mr. Lehtola asked for a motion to accept the minutes of June 20, 2013 and **Mr. Belanger made the motion and Mr. Lipka seconded.** All voted in favor. The motion was accepted.

Mr. Lehtola informed the board and the guests there were some changes coming up for late August and we will address them first so if anyone had any questions they could be asked after that.

### 4. Administrator's Report

Mr. O'Neil opened his remarks by giving a brief overview of the move to the new hub itself and concerns that have occurred during that time period. Mr. O'Neil explained WRTA had problems with nine (9) routes and then six (6), but the WRTA was able to reduce the six (6) to three (3) within a short period of time. So what we are going to do today is show what some of those problems were and then spend time illustrating how these problems will be corrected.

- Mr. O'Neil praised the cooperative efforts of Mr. Lehtola, management and the union for their commitment to improving the service and working together to solve problems in a holistic manner. Mr. O'Neil explained that the proposals before you today reflect not only input from the union, management and CMRPC, but also from the public. Mr. O'Neil further acknowledged the first public hearing was attended by about fifty-five (55) persons while the second hearing at Union Station, Union Hall, saw twenty-five (25) to thirty (30) people. Mr. O'Neil reinstated the policy of wanting to get information directly from the public is working and the use of CMRPC staff conducting a platform survey done during this very week is another example of this proactive public response campaign.
- Mr. O'Neil introduced Mr. Church who would be presenting the board and guests the proposed fixed route service changes for August 2013 which include thirteen (13) recommended changes and the goal being to vote so that they can implemented on August 24, 2013. Mr. O'Neil stated it is the belief of everyone involved these changes will correct the mistakes made and we acknowledge those mistakes and offer a good solution in remedying them. All questions should be held off until the presentation is finished. Mr. Carney, Mr. Parker and I will be available to answer any questions.
- Mr. Church went through the presentation's main topics which were: service issues, analysis of data collected, assets, finances related to the free shuttle, proposed route changes and customer feedback. Mr. Hamman explained the IT analysis and upcoming changes. Further details on these topics are provided in the attached Power Point presentation. In the area of service issues the following was covered:
  - External factors - construction work, traffic signalization high volume etc.
  - Technology related issues - LED Signs, Bustracker web, arrival announcement system etc.

- Administrative operational reports – average daily boarding, on time performance, specifically one time and by weeks covering the problematic period.
  - Survey data and collections – used for ridership feedback for proposed changes.
  - Customer outreach. - public hearings, customer survey done July 8-10 2013.
- Also explained were the available assets which stand at forty-seven (47) buses plus three (3) contingency buses. The WRTA has six (6) new electric buses on order for fall delivery 2013 and fifteen (15) replacement buses for older RTA models on order. Funding was explained as the existing budget is \$22,159,389 (FY14) and all proposed changes with the exception of the free shuttle are cost neutral. The free downtown shuttle has a range of hours and cost associated is listed below. Start date would be July 29, 2013.
    - 8:00am to 4pm                      \$ 80,000
    - 8:00am to 6pm                      \$100,000
    - 8:00am to 8pm                      \$120,000

Mr. Lehtola commented that right now we're scheduling it for Monday through Friday from 8:00 a. m. until 4:00 p.m., but that is fluid and we have not made a final decision on hours as to whether future expansion or contraction would be necessary.

- Mr. Church explained about asset limitations as they would relate to new services at this time and proposed route changes under review. Mr. Church offered the following as examples.
  - 50 minute service between Webster Sq. Plaza and Lincoln Plaza along the Main and Lincoln Streets
  - Provide added frequency along Main and Lincoln Streets.
- Mr. Church then went through each of the 13 changes to the fixed routes listing the number of the routes, the proposed changes and rider feedback/union feedback if given.
- Mr. Church also reviewed routes serving and not serving city hall. Routes continuing to serve city hall are: route two (2) inbound, three (3) inbound, six (6), seven (7), eight (8), eighteen (18) nineteen (19), twenty-seven (27) and thirty-three (33). Routes no longer serving city hall are: one (1), four (4), five (5), eleven (11), fourteen (14), fifteen (15), sixteen (16), twenty-two (22), twenty three (23), twenty-four (24), twenty-five (25), twenty-six (26), thirty (30) and forty-two (42).

Mr. Lehtola noted that exceptions with 5 paired with 27, 23 paired with 19 and 30 with 6 but not 3 outbound. Route 2 outbound will not have access to city hall, but the WRTA is working with the city to change that by adding a stop on Front Street.

- Mr. Hamman then spoke about technology related actions items highlights of which are listed below:
  - Change from route based scrolling to time based scrolling on the platform – July 2013,
  - Installation of LED Signs on the platform by September 2013,
  - System wide overview maps on the platform by September 2013,
  - Continued active monitoring of the Bustracker web site and
  - Continuation of human based announcements with target month of September for having the system fully operational.

Mr. Lehtola asked if there can be a large sign available for showing more buses like the next twelve (12) buses or so that an overview can be seen by the public. Mr. Hamman replied that for a cost it would be possible, however the three (3) smaller screens going up this month it should help with this issue.

Mr. Binnall asked what the timeline for the announcement improvements would be. Mr. Hamman responded that all information regarding the buses should be through the overhead system by late September.

- Mr. O'Neil stated the information on the platform itself was a priority and as of today we are working with our consultant on a system wide map and a couple of options have been provided. Mr. O'Neil also drew attention to what is not shown in the presentation which is the additional benches people asked for at the public meeting. We asked the architect for some cut sheets to give us some ideas that are different than the ones that are there, but that will fit in to the overall theme presented. Some people wanted backs on the benches so we are looking into options that somewhat marries up with what's already there. We will pick something out and have it installed in the coming months.
- Mr. O'Neil spoke of another issue raised regarding the platform which is the impact of wind on the platform. He explained that putting up a semi walled or partially enclosed area, if considered, should be fully researched and surveyed not only for building code, but rider safety and consistent protection or blocking of the changing wind patterns. Mr. O'Neil stated he would rather wait to address the various wind conditions for the best options and experience a winter on the platform before making a decision.

Mr. Lipka noted the wind issue is much wider than most people think as dead spots can be created and the administration should go cautious on putting things up.

Mr. Ostrosky suggested that unused bus shelters might be a quick temporary option to the wind problem and they could be placed on the platform.

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

Mr. Lehtola stated as far as the on-time performance is concerned, it's totally unacceptable at this point in time and I will not be a happy person until we have the on-time performance down to where it belongs.

- Mr. Lehtola commented why we were going to hourly on Route 2. Mr. Parker then responded so enough time would be provided to reach both Sunny Hill Drive and the Worcester Airport.
- Mr. Lehtola confirmed that the number of passengers were more in line with hourly service as with several other routes and was being over served in comparison. Mr. O'Neil added unlike the past we made changes without information readily available as we can today with our technology. Prior, we relied upon survey work that was done by the time close to the years end by CMRPC. We use this new data in addition to getting drivers responses to make these decisions.
- Mr. O'Neil spoke about working with the city's assistant traffic engineer who made accommodations in regards to the signal at Foster and Front Streets. Any further considerations would be reviewed after construction in the downtown has stopped. Mr. Lehtola announced that we are working with the city's traffic engineers with that light and we are seeing improvement.
- As for specific routes, Mr. Lehtola noted there might be a few other tweaks specifically on Route 4 or Route 11 Extra in the afternoon. Some minor changes on Route 11 Extra, which currently goes down to Autumn Woods and then terminates at the bakery, will be adjusted by bringing it down Green Street, Harding Street and Millbury Street (on the outbound trips) to WalMart.
- Route 26 will turn at Great Brook Valley instead of going to Allegro.
- Mr. Belanger commented on the administration's ability to hear the board and the direction they wanted to go. He felt the steps being made are positive. He indicated there is still work to be done specifically with on-time scheduling and technology issues that relate to operations. Mr. Belanger was also concerned certain considerations like ongoing construction, traffic signalization, high volumes of traffic flow, along with other technology-related issues were not sufficiently addressed by the consultants and advisors hired. Mr. Belanger stated preparations for any type of anticipation were not addressed in any manner that could have short ended the effects the public felt due to these problems. Mr. Belanger also expressed the need for accountability; this fault is only worth bringing up if we can learn from it or hold someone accountable for it.
- Mr. Lehtola responded that when the planning was going on Front Street didn't exist as it does now and therefore there was no way of knowing the turn time from Foster Street to Front Street would be so short or long depending upon the time of day. So I will give that as a partial excuse. I am not saying that is the only problem, but that definitely was a major problem in trying to anticipate.

- Mr. Belanger acknowledged the statement made with appreciation, but felt that the issues of peak traffic control and its impact the ridership had damaged the confidence of our ridership with this board and our administrator.
- Mr. O'Neil commented that what we have built up over the last six and a half years is rapidly dwindling. This is why we're looking to make changes within the system working together as rapidly as possible so as to move forward in the most proactive and ridership positive way. What you're telling us now, at this meeting, is all part of the processes for continual evaluation and adjustments in overall change.
- Mr. Belanger asked Mr. O'Neil to explain the cost neutral issue. Mr. O'Neil stated that what we did when moving to technology with the APC and what that information provides us with is how routes are performing in their entirety. We are now able to have a more pronounced and efficient way to look at the routes that are not performing and then make adjustments. Poorly performing routes or portions of routes can be eliminated and savings generated can be placed elsewhere in the system where needed.
- When we can't do that we need to add more dollars and that's the \$80,000 that you have for the free shuttle. So, certainly if the board wants to put more time or hours into the free bus service, we can do that and we've also given you a two hour incremental costs for you to look at.
- Lastly, the signals we are getting from Boston right now and being echoed by the House is that it's pretty clear to us the House, and I think probably the Senate, will do the same in overturning the governor's veto. The governor will have another crack at a veto in 10 days. What passes the House and Senate and the subsequent veto money will be based from roughly where we are now at \$9.2 million in state assistance to another \$300,000 for this fiscal year, as well as the inclusion of forward funding so that give us more room to make some adjustments.
- Mr. Schiller commented that the written language doesn't help me to fully comprehend the changes and adjustments, especially concerning pairing. Mr. Lehtola explains that in order to have proper scheduling for the system overall certain routes pair. Buses currently in assets are utilized for the service provided expanding service with the current fleet would not be possible. At this time all buses are designated for routes and breakdowns while staffing accommodations would need to be adjusted to achieve such goals. The free shuttle cost covers more ground in operations than just adding or expanding services.
- Mr. Gaumond commented that he is willing to give the changes proposed here time to work and to adopt the recommendations as amended. Mr. Gaumond also asked what is the evaluation process things go through to make sure that these changes are actually working and valuable to operations and to our riders
- Mr. Conner commented on the need for monthly reports from operations with

information regarding on-time scheduling ridership, overviews, and other related information to the system in general. Mr. Conner thereby requested that the board get an operational report on a monthly basis.

- Mr. Lehtola responded to both by stating that a monthly report will be given to the board and Mr. O'Neil interjected that any other specific information can be requested and will be provided. Mr. Lehtola then continued by explaining that the inspectors are basically a group of veteran drivers who like myself know our system. We feel confident that this is going to work out better. Could there be a minor problem along the way? Absolutely as nothing is strongly etched in stone, but we are very comfortable with it.
- **Mr. Gaumond stated that he'd like to move to accept the amendment for the changes brought forth today.** Mr. Lehtola then stated that **we have a motion, but the motion was held.**
- Mr. Ostrosky asked if route 15 to Shrewsbury could be changed and if all buses that run through Shrewsbury center could do so on an hourly basis. Mr. Lehtola replied that was not part of the current proposed changes, but they are looking through on-time scheduling data and it is quite possible this will be the case. Mr. Ostrosky commented on the construction issue stating that there should be a set of contingency plans and a way to get this information out to the public.
- Mr. O'Neil replied that the WRTA does put in place methods to get around normal construction issues. The move to the hub combined with the intense construction in the downtown so proximate to the new hub, along with route changes, exacerbated the schedule adherence of our buses. As an aside, we had a meeting this afternoon with the state regarding the significance bridge projects happening down by Lake Quinsigamond and the work proposed for the Belmont Street Bridge. So, we are proactive and trying to work with various aspects to find the best solutions. We are giving our input and thereby facilitating the most effective adjustments when possible.
- Mr. Lipka stated that we have been at hub planning concept for many years and while construction issues arise the issues for schedule delay as stated - traffic signalization, narrow corridors, high volumes of traffic flow in p.m. peak isn't a secret as Worcester is a major city. I am somewhat disappointed that we were not better at these issues as they are continual factors, not only for the WRTA but throughout the city in general. Our response to these problems was rather a fumble. As we made investments in technology there should be some way that we can get the word out within minutes or hours and in a consistent manner of mediums to all parties. I also would like to stress the importance of a contingency plan.
- Mr. Lehtola asked Mr. O'Neil how much money was spent in trying to adjust the system during this time. Mr. O'Neil replied probably \$100,000 which was authorized by board.
- Mr. Binnall asked about bus twenty-five (25), which Mr. Carney replied will go down Southbridge Street to Myrtle and will not go right in front of City Hall.

- Mr. Belanger made a statement regarding the fumble comment in regards to authorizing the chairman to work closely with the administration on getting things done. Mr. Belanger further stated that our chairman should be seen as our “nimble” representative. As for our budget we need to be cautious and we should have an administration contingency line item to cover the cost of route adjustments and discuss this in coming months.

## 6. Business from the Advisory Board Members

- Ms. Hart spoke about the need for more schedules, maps of the overall system on the platform and better customer communication. Ms. Hart stated the free shuttle was not sustainable in her opinion as the regular routes need attention specifically all going back to city hall. Ms. Hart noted that some of the buses are without numbers and that stops need to be added specifically near the hospital and the DCU center.
- Ms. Fuller commented on the importance of timely communication between riders and what is happening on routes, deadheading issues and dispatching. Ms. Fuller asked that Route 11 at peak time needs a larger bus and that the shuttle be extended to 6:00 p.m. Ms. Fuller was concerned with the smoking on the platform. She indicated that administration pursue all available grants.
- Ms. Kelly commented that the announcements cannot be heard and that expansion of the hub building hours would help with the wind issues despite how small it is inside. Ms. Kelly noted that more benches are needed on the platform and Routes 30 and 31 need to be on the Main Street.
- Mr. O’Neil replied that we are able to extend hours of the free shuttle operations with the board’s approval. He clarified that if the building were to be open on Sunday’s, only the lobby and Dunkin Donuts would be open.
- Mr. Provost spoke of the importance of city hall as a stop because the stores and location is what people are used to and that additional stops are needed especially due to the changes to the hub. John also spoke of stops on Church Street to be used by the free shuttle.
- **Mr. Belanger stated that he would second the motion made by Mr. Gaumont to accept the amended changes brought forth with another amending to further authorize the chairman to approve minor adjustments with the recommendations of administration with final approval to be ratified at the following board meeting. All voted in favor this motion was accepted.**
- Mr. O’Neil spoke to the motion in regards to getting the wording right and that latitude is given to 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. for the shuttle. He was advised by the board that it was.

## 7. Adjournment

- Chairman Lehtola asked for a motion to adjourn **Mr. Belanger made the motion and Mr. Binnall seconded. All voted in favor and the motion to adjourn accepted** the meeting adjourned at 10:29 a.m.

#### **8. Next Meeting Date**

- The next board meeting will be on August 15, 2013 at 8:30 a.m. located at the Hub 60 Foster Street Worcester MA 01608 3<sup>rd</sup> floor.