



MINUTES of 08/21/2014 ADVISORY BOARD MEETING

ATTENDANCE

Name

Representing

PRESENT

William Lehtola
Edward Augustus
Jarrett Conner
Doug Belanger
Mark Binnall
Rudy Heller
John Ostrosky
Robert Spain

Spencer
Worcester
Worcester
Leicester
Auburn
Brookfield
Shrewsbury
Millbury

ABSENT

Kelly Burke
Leon Gaumond Jr.
Alyssa Graveson
Dennis Lipka
Timothy McInerney
Kevin Mizikar
Daniel Morgado
Michael Pantos
David Schiller
Michael Ward
Luz Vega

Northborough
West Boylston
Douglas
Holden
Grafton
Grafton
Shrewsbury
Rutland
Charlton
Clinton
Regional Ridership

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 July 17, 2014.
- **Mr. Belanger made the motion and Mr. Binnall seconded.** All other board members voted in favor. The motion was accepted.

4. Administrator Report

- Mr. O'Neil informed the board about the coordinated efforts of CMRPC and Mr. O'Day, director of the Elder Bus, with regards to the recently won grant for the continuation and extension of their employment transit program. Mr. O'Neil explained the competitiveness for the \$60,000 grant was extensive and also attributed its selection to Elder Bus on the basis of a successful first year and write-ups on the MassDOT website. Mr. O'Neil introduced Mr. O'Day who spoke about the specifics of the program and the additional hours added, alongside the public relations efforts initiated through its running.
- Mr. O'Day explained the program provides work related transportation without restrictions based on age or disability to anyone living in Southbridge and Webster. He noted that almost two years have passed and their initial modest expectations have been far exceeded. Mr. O'Day stated the service has run without additional manpower or vehicles and the only expense has been the gasoline. The newly received grant will allow for expansion of service hours from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. to 6: a.m. to 4:00 p.m., as well as, additional service throughout the town of Southbridge to include elderly and disability pick up and drop off. The expanded hours and service started July of 2014 and now they are reaching back into the community to promote the expansion of service in those towns. Part of those expansion efforts includes businesses and regional chambers of commerce.
- Mr. O'Day explained his anticipation for a modest beginning and the necessary monitoring and reporting for compliance will be done. Mr. O'Day noted the program overall received some good publicity from the Mass Department of Transportation via write-ups in their newsletter and their website. Mr. O'Day also spoke about his presentations to the Regional Coordinating Council and Metro West RTA.
- Mr. Binnall inquired if this service brings people to the Southbridge Public Library. Mr. O'Day replied they already have a service outside of the Ready Bus for that purpose. He explained they pick up the senior or disabled person and bring them to the fixed route stop and from there they take the bus to the library. As far as the town of Webster goes, all they are looking into providing the same type of service to the fixed-route bus stop, however, nothing has been initiated yet as only Southbridge is showing demand at this time.
- Mr. Belanger mentioned the importance of communicating when the WRTA expands services, especially in and with direct contact to employers. He suggested both employers place notices into employee paychecks as well as direct contact with public and private housing complexes. Board members then discussed an array of direct options that would

benefit and improve ridership. Mr. Augustus commented on making connections with all Chambers of Commerce both individual and regional in regards to their website and email/newsletter lists for promotions. Mr. O'Neil stated the recently formed steering committee has Mr. Loosemore, a Worcester Regional Chamber employee, who has offered to assist with just such efforts. Mr. O'Neil agreed with the general consensus of expanding communication to businesses.

- Mr. O'Neil next recognized the efforts of Mr. Coyne and Mr. Church regarding the work each did to comply with the requirements of Title VI. These efforts are essential if the WRTA desires to secure future grants.
- With regards to the Comprehensive Service Review, the WRTA held between seventeen (17) and twenty (20) listening sessions to get comments on service, operations, fares and other feedback. These sessions took place in seven (7) neighborhoods in addition to the mobile listening sessions that occurred out in high traffic areas.
- In regards to surveys, Mr. O'Neil informed the board they are still conducting surveys. So far about 300 have been compiled with a goal for 500 in total. Mr. O'Neil spoke about meetings at colleges and the consortium, as well as human service agencies throughout the region thanks to the Regional Coordinating Council. Mr. O'Neil stated they will continue to expand into areas of businesses and all information will be fed back to the board and ultimately recommendations will be made based on funding, public input and overall sustainability.
- Mr. O'Neil introduced Ms. Blunt who gave a brief overview of the listening sessions. The comments were categorized under Routing, Procedures, Expansion, Facilities, Fares and Other. Ms. Blunt explained the listening sessions were structured very specifically not to initiate dialogue, but for the WRTA to sit and take comments. Sessions were attended by anywhere from three (3) to thirty (30) people. Ms. Blunt explained what often happened was people started to dialogue amongst themselves and so the flavor of each one was very different. In total, about 250 comments were received, but this report shows the most repetitive comments only. All original data collected will be submitted to URS for their analysis. Highlights are as follows:
 - Add cross-town and loop routes
 - Reduce back-to-back buses & eliminate early buses
 - Fine tune technical issues with Bus Tracker
 - Hold buses at hub an extra minute for low frequency routes
 - More service for colleges, Park Ave. and Spectrum House
 - Community expansion to Holden, Westborough and Route 9
 - More late night and weekend service
 - Discount passes for youth/veterans
 - Winter snow removal improvements

- Mr. Blunt made mention of comments in regards to the hub. She explained overall those attending reviewed the hub favorable, but improvements ranged to more services. Additional items like a change machine, vending machines, expanded security, lighting, and seating were requested. The full report as prepared for the board can be viewed at the following link. [WRTA Comprehensive Service Analysis Listening Sessions August 2014.](#)
- Mr. O’Neil recommended an increase in the hours for the security presently at the hub by about 53 hours. Increases would be Monday-Friday 6:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Saturday from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. Sunday 9:15 a.m. to 8:45 p.m. The additional cost would be \$49,411 and the cost per hour of the personnel would go from \$10 to \$12 per hour. This change is part of a three-part strategy. The second part would be to issue an RFP for another service, while the third would be to look into hiring WPD officers. We are confident the additional hours and our continual work with the WPD for stop-in checks will address concerns. We are working with the company to expand the walk site of security to cover the bike rack and for more coverage on the platform. Mr. O’Neil explained a gradual approach allows us to fully consider all alternatives and allows the WRTA to pin point and focus on its security needs as a whole.
- Mr. Ostrosky asked if hiring in-house security may not be a more viable solution in the future given the raise in security expense to just around \$98,000 per year. Board members discussed the need for a tiered approach and some like the limited liability that comes with sub-contracting out this service. Mr. Binnall asked if the present security has the power to arrest people and Mr. O’Neil replied they must call the WPD for arrests.
- Mr. O’Neil gave an update on the 42 Quinsigamond Ave project. He stated we’ve done our analysis on the contamination and now Skanska, STV and the OPM have met with the four companies to go through the details of the properties analysis. The four companies have now taken this information and as of tomorrow they will resubmit their best and final offer. From that point, we will choose one of the contractors in anticipation of the work beginning after Labor Day. It will take about five (5) months to clean and prepare the site for building. The application for the foundation and building permits will be filed with the city’s Buildings Department. We are looking at a completion time of spring 2016.
- Mr. O’Neil introduced Mr. Church who gave an overview of the Monthly Operations Report to the board. Highlights from July 2014 report are listed below and the full report can be viewed by clicking on the following link: [WRTA July 2014 MOR.pdf](#)
- Mr. Church explained we are moving into comparing numbers for the hub to a year ago. Total revenue for July 2014 was 2.5% higher compared to July 2013 and monthly pass sales and Charlie Card stored value both continue their increasing trend compared to last year. Ridership for July 2014 increased 2.9% compared to June 2014, and ridership in July 2014 was higher than July 2013 by 5%. Passengers per Revenue Mile figures were 2.16 overall and five (5) routes surpassed our current goal of 2.5 they were Routes 11,19,24,26 and 27. Missed trips for July 2014 were at 21 compared to 155 last July.

Customer Service had a total of 6,164 visits to the window with 51% for ticket/passes purchases. Reports from ZenDesk for the month of July show that a total of 544 tickets were created with the highest contact usage coming from both phone/voicemail 36% and emails at 24%.

- Mr. Belanger excused himself from the board meeting at 9:32 a.m.
- Mr. O'Neil spoke about customer service in regards to its next steps in call tracking reports and their commitment to a 48 hour response initiative. Mr. O'Neil introduced Mr. Hamman, who has been working with the customer service unit during the changes. Mr. Hamman gave a brief overview of the automatically generated monthly reports in regards to customer service.
- Mr. Hamman informed the board about the replacement of ZenDesk software with Salesforce software. This new system went live on the 28th of July and has been easily adopted by the call takers and customer service window team. Mr. Hamman indicated the new system is more robust and easier to use. Mr. Hamman stated the reports are self-generated and are based on all the data entering the system. This data includes PBSI and next month, the window visits at both the hub and 287 Grove Street will be incorporated. The project as we speak today is 75% completed and the data today reflects reporting up to this point. Mr. Hamman explained the WRTA gets about 1,000 cases a week and has 28 open, which is a good ratio. The highest volumes of cases are actually people scheduling rides. Complaints on average are between one (1) and (10) on any given day, and closed cases reflect those resolved. Mr. Hamman noted that during the change over any backlog from ZenDesk was incorporated, however, that is being cleared as we continue this month. Overall the numbers are in good standing.
- Mr. Lehtola stated in his opinion the changes made within customer service have resulted in a 1,000% improvement over the prior system. Mr. O'Neil concurred as he has received positive feedback when attending numerous outreach presentations. Mr. Binnall asked if the message for leaving information on the voice mail could be more descriptive and Mr. O'Neil advised him to speak with Mr. Hamman directly.
- Mr. O'Neil then spoke about making arrangements to have the Farmers Market down at the north end of the site, twice in September and once in October.
- Mr. O'Neil informed the board that the RFP was underway for an appraisal service for the property at 287 Grove Street.
- Mr. Lehtola requested that the board forward any comments regarding the 40th Anniversary bus wraps to Mr. O'Neil within the next two weeks. This prompted discussion amongst the board members on how to market the event. Mr. Augustus spoke about free rides for the designated day, while board members voiced concern over how to compensate monthly-pass holders if a free day was issued. No conclusions were drawn at this time by the board members.

5. Business from the Board

- Board members discussed the need for a more coordinated effort between city planning and the WRTA on design and construction of road projects. The members expressed concern for the long standing problems of traffic flow due to construction. Mr. O'Neil stated the administration has asked for a voice at the table when analysis is being made regarding public right-of-ways. Mr. O'Neil informed the board their concerns are being addressed by the DPW, but long term issues like designated bus lanes and readjustment of some street ways when monies are allotted, should be a priority. Also mentioned by members were the following key areas of congestion: Cambridge St., Gates Lane School area, and Main South. Board members emphasized the key component to sustainable public transportation is the access in all types of weather throughout the city's neighborhoods. Board members also discussed working out alternative routes during long construction periods whenever possible and outreaching with notices in regards to any changes or considerations that may help in specific areas.
- Mr. O'Neil commented on the snow removal policy of the WRTA and stated that within the downtown central business district about fifty (50) stops are being maintained by the WRTA while the remaining 1,500 in the city proper are not able to be maintained due to budgeting.
- Mr. Ostrosky asked if the heavy rainfall had a flooding impact on the building site and Mr. O'Neil replied no change has been detected.
- Mr. Binnall asked why Routes 23 does not go into the Lincoln Plaza on Saturdays. Mr. Lehtola explained 23 is paired with 19, so on Saturdays it would not meet on-time performance. He informed Mr. Binnall both Routes 16 and 31 go into the plaza on Saturdays.
- Mr. Lehtola informed the board members of the continual increase in ridership from last July. He stated an increase has occurred in twenty-one (21) out of the twenty-four (24) routes we have in service, and he has not seen this in the fifteen (15) years he has been looking at the figures.
- Mr. Augustus commented on the use of niche marketing to specific locations of interest or businesses, coupled with a specific promotional bus stop sign for the location(s). He stated perhaps a sponsorship could be paid and service would be adjusted to meet upcoming needs.

6. Business from the Public

- Mr. Lehtola called for business from the public. No one responded.

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 9:53 a.m.

8. Next Meeting Date

- The next board meeting will be on September 18, 2014, at 8:30 a.m. located at the Hub 60 Foster Street Worcester, MA 01608 3rd floor.