



MINUTES of 02/19/2015 ADVISORY BOARD MEETING

ATTENDANCE

Name

Representing

PRESENT

William Lehtola
Doug Belanger
Mark Binnall
Jarrett Conner
Dennis Lipka
John Ostrosky
Robert Spain

Spencer
Leicester
Auburn
Worcester
Holden
Shrewsbury
Millbury

ABSENT

Kelly Burke
Alyssa Graveson
Rudy Heller
Timothy McInerney
Kevin Mizikar
Daniel Morgado
Michael Pantos
David Schiller
Luz Vega
Michael Ward

Northborough
Douglas
Brookfield
Grafton
Grafton
Shrewsbury
Rutland
Charlton
Regional Ridership
Clinton

1. Chairman Lehtola called the meeting to order at 8:33 a.m.
2. **Attendance**

3. Acceptance of Minutes

- Mr. Lehtola asked for a motion to accept the minutes for January 19, 2015.
- **Motion: I move the board accept the minutes of January 19, 2015.** Mr. Belanger made the motion and Mr. Ostrosky seconded. All other board members voted in favor. The motion was accepted.
- Mr. Lehtola commented on the outstanding work performed by all the WRTA employees over the past three weeks, especially in regards to the extreme weather conditions. He asked that management convey the board's gratitude for a job done extremely well under very trying circumstances. Mr. Lehtola mentioned how important safety is to the WRTA and despite two (2) days of shut downs and some setbacks, we have been moving right along. A particular note of appreciation went to the drivers who are continually handling the weather related road conditions, eight (8) to nine (9) hours a day.
- 8:38 a.m. Mr. Lipka joined the advisory board meeting.

4. Administrator Report

- Mr. O'Neil informed the board the potential 9c cuts would not materialize, as the governor has found ways to meet the \$750-million deficit without making cuts in transportation. The RTA's will not see changes in funding for the FY`15 year. Mr. O'Neil stated he was not sure about FY`16, but they are going under the assumption level funding will continue. Mr. Lehtola asked if this was confirmed. Mr. O'Neil stated it has been confirmed. Mr. O'Neil told the board the FY`16 budget is being put together. Mr. Coyne interjected all the forms necessary for FY`16 budgeting have been sent out and are due back by the first week of March. He stated the state contract assistance money is due the first week of March. Prior payments have been on schedule. Mr. Coyne advised the board the consolidated budget will be put together for the boards review for the March meeting.
- Mr. Coyne gave an update on the six (6) month budget actuals. This report can be viewed in its entirety at the following link: [Q2 Report 2.19.2015 WRTA AB.pdf](#). Highlights of the report are listed and the dates covered are July 1, 2014 to December 31, 2014.
- Operational revenue was higher than budgeted by \$158,000, due to an increase in farebox and monthly passes. Ridership increased by 7.2 percent over the same time period last year. Operational expenses were lower than budgeted by \$394,000, due largely to decreased overtime. Materials and supplies were lower due to average fleet age of 3.35 years. Our gasoline, oil, and lubricants were lower than budgeted, due to gasoline being at a six (6) year low. The overall actual results are lower than budgeted by \$609,122 or 7.9 percent. We expect some of that will be used up due to the numerous storms we have

been experiencing in the beginning of 2015.

- Mr. O'Neil explained the budget covers both facilities and the company hired to shovel out all our downtown bus stops and shelters. Mr. Lehtola asked if any complaints had come in regarding shoveling out the stops. Mr. Trabucco stated there have been a few. We have responded by explaining our policy on shoveling out stops in the downtown area. We also are encouraging the community to help with the shoveling out of stops.
- Fiscal year 2015 issues going forward were highlighted and Mr. Belanger asked if the increased security cost would continue. Mr. Coyne stated it would be continued as it was asked for both by the board and in numerous public listening sessions. Mr. Belanger reiterated that increased security is a priority as the board asked specifically for better quality and expansion of hours. Mr. Lehtola then interjected we want passengers to feel comfortable and safe when they are at the hub.
- Mr. O'Neil introduced Mr. Trabucco, who gave a recount of an unfortunate occurrence in regards to a setback on February 3, 2015. Mr. Trabucco explained how the Route six (6) driver called in for a setback at the second stop (on Chandler Street), as he was ninety (90) minutes behind. The inspector told the driver to disembark the five (5) passengers and to ride through to the end of the line. The driver explained the situation and the passengers disembarked at the stop. The driver informed the passengers, as instructed, that the next Route six (6) bus was at the hub and would be reaching them in about four (4) minutes. The passengers waited in twenty (20) degree weather for the next bus to arrive. The driver then continued through to the end of the line. Route six (6) at the Hub picked up its passengers, who were all going to stops on the Route thirty (30) so the driver called the inspector and asked to take his passengers straight through to the Route thirty (30), thereby by-passing the Route six (6) stops. The starter gave the all clear for the driver to do so, forgetting the previous conversation regarding a setback request. The first driver on their way back noticed the people still at the stop and called dispatch. Dispatch explained that fifteen minutes after the driver left the Hub on the Route (30) destination the mistake was realized. The starter then called the driver back, however, the bus was too far out to turn around.
- As a result of this miscommunication, the passengers waited for forty-seven (47) minutes to be picked up. By the time the pick-up occurred, three (3) passengers had left the stop so only two (2) remained. Mr. Trabucco said one passenger was very angry and he totally understands why. Mr. Trabucco identified this as a terrible mistake and not one that happens often because we train and handle setbacks on a regular basis. The inspector should have told the starter not to proceed to ride through on Route thirty (30). This was the starter's fault and she was coached and counseled properly in her performance log, as well as her file. Discussions were held on how to avoid this situation in the future. Mr. Trabucco explained he researched the video of the events and found all parties acted in accordance with company's standards. Mr. Trabucco told the board members we have the tools necessary so that this does not happen. This was a human error and he apologized on behalf of the WRTA and to those five (5) people.

- Board members inquired as to the policy surrounding the issue. Mr. Lehtola asked if an extra driver was available. Mr. Trabucco replied no extra drivers were on duty and it would not have reduced the wait time given this situation. Mr. Conner spoke about his concern over current policy and how to change things. He suggested in regards to mid-stream departures, the other bus should be at the location before disembarking riders. Mr. Conner felt strongly that the WRTA when picking up a passenger makes a promise to get them to a stop. Mr. Lehtola suggested the system be set-up with more report drivers during inclement weather as a way to deter this situation. Mr. O'Neil stated this would be put into place immediately. Mr. Belanger asked if going forward another WRTA vehicle is used to pick-up the passengers. Mr. Lehtola stated SUV's can be made available and he agreed this should be done. Mr. Trabucco explained generally set-backs are done from the Hub. Mr. Belanger closed the board members discussion by stating the WRTA employees do an excellent job overall and we will continue to address issues and make changes.
- Mr. O'Neil indicated we have been bringing the board ideas, standards, and strategies in regards to our scheduling. The issue of dwell time has been talked about internally over the past several months. In this regard, we would like to eliminate the use of nickels and dimes from the fareboxes. We are looking to implement this change on April 25, 2015. Mr. O'Neil explained a while back we eliminated the use of pennies and the next natural progression would be nickels and dimes. This is an industry trend and it has the benefit of reducing dwell times. We will continue to promote and educate the ridership on the cost savings benefits of the Charlie Card and now introduce the dwell time benefits of both the Charlie Card and the quarter and dollar farebox system.
- Mr. O'Neil stated Mr. Carney has been working on ways to implement this change and has a presentation for the board. Mr. Carney then introduced Ms. Kosterski who would be assisting him with the presentation. Mr. Carney stated they met with Neighbor to Neighbor to get feedback and their reaction was positive. Neighbor to Neighbor pledged to support the outreach efforts of this change. Mr. Carney acknowledged the input provided by Ms. Vega as valuable and incorporated her suggested themes into their presentation.
- The presentation highlighted the saving figures on regular and reduced fares per ride, and by the number of trips when using Charlie Cards/WRTA Passes. The Presentation also listed talking points and gave some basic outreach options. The entire presentation can be viewed by clicking on the following link: [Dollar Quarter Presentation 2-19-15](#).
 - ❖ Full fare Charlie Card savings are at \$0.20 per ride.
 - ❖ Reduced Charlie Card savings are at \$0.10 per ride.
 - ❖ The cash cost of a regular ride is \$1.50 and reduced is \$0.75 when stored on a Charlie Card the value is \$1.30 and \$0.65 respectively for each ride. In summary, the Charlie Card offers overall savings, and the convenience of not having to get the correct change. It reduces dwell time when boarding the bus as it is estimated that 45 seconds per passenger is taken when using cash at the farebox.

- ❖ One day passes offer savings even over the Charlie Card if you take more than four (4) trips as the cost per ride reduces to \$0.88.
 - ❖ The 31 day passes offer savings if you take two (2) trips five (5) days per week as it reduces to \$1.10 per ride.
 - ❖ Reduced fare participants also see savings using the One Day and 31 Day passes according to trips and ride amounts.
- Mr. Carney reviewed briefly how dwell time impacts the ridership by increasing normal terminus layover time, on-time performance figures, and general delays that can frustrate other riders. He addressed the linguistics of correct change by explaining the ticket vending machines will continue to take nickels, dimes, and quarters. The change machine at the Hub breaks down twenties, tens and one dollar bills into the correct change format for the \$1.50 individual fare. Ms. Kusterski explained their outreach efforts would be phased in starting this month. They have been doing on-the-spot ticket vending machine training at the Hub and will be expanding their general community outreach education. Marketing materials would appear in both English and Spanish on the buses, shelters, and internal media. Mr. Carney wanted to assure the board members and the public that patience and consideration will be the cornerstones of this process. All operators will be retrained to use discretion and passengers will not be thrown off the bus if they, occasionally, do not have the correct fare. Supervisors will be deployed to enforce the rules and travel training will be provided to assist riders.
 - Board members discussed the importance of continuing to educate the public on the Charlie Card. Mr. Belanger suggested using the listening session's bus outreach as a model. Board members talked about possibly extending the April start date, thereby allowing for more time to promote the Charlie Card discount until the cash transactions are reduced significantly. Mr. Conner suggested a notice on the fareboxes with respect to the new policy. Mr. O'Neil informed the board additional ticket vending machines are in the capital plan. Sites for consideration would be Great Brook Valley and City Hall. Board members agreed dwell time is an important issue to address for both the scheduling and ridership. Board members conveyed to the administration a step-by-step process would be most beneficial. Mr. Lipka asked what percentage of riders use cash. Mr. Carney replied about fifty (50) to fifty-five (55) percent are using cash. The board member concurred not all riders would shift over, but the benefits of this change are overwhelmingly positive.
 - In terms of marketing, the board members suggested a soft-sell approach. Some wording used was "to improve efficiencies we are transferring to," "please use," "we now use," "help us to improve service by." Board members discussed ideas for follow-through after implementation of the policy. They suggested preloaded Charlie Cards for drivers, flyers of explanation, and personnel on the platform to assist. Board members voiced their concern over the WRTA Charlie Card reduced fare savings versus state wide access pass reduced fares. The Charlie Card reduced fare savings only applies when using the WRTA system. Given this factor, the board members suggested separate notices to the public in this regard. Mr. Ostrosky asked if the state wide access passes could be

purchased at the TVM. Ms. Kusterski replied they could not as an application process must be completed. However, they can be re-loaded at the machines. Board members closed the discussion giving their overall support for the change.

- Mr. O'Neil introduced Mr. Church who gave a summary of the Monthly Operations Report for January 2015. The entire WRTA Monthly Operations Report can be viewed at the following link: [WRTA January 2015 MOR.pdf](#).
- - ❖ Total revenue for January FY`15 was 5.57% lower compared to January FY`14 however, FY`15 YTD shows an increase in Total Revenue over FY`14 YTD.
 - ❖ Ridership was lower than January FY`14 by 3.5% however, FY`15 YTD shows an increase in Ridership over FY`14 YTD.
 - ❖ Passenger per Revenue Mile was 1.85% which was lower than last year (1.9) however, FY`15 YTD shows an increase in Passengers per Revenue Mile over FY`14 YTD.
 - ❖ Passenger per Revenue Hour was 21.05, which is lower than last year (21.68) however, FY`15 YTD shows an increase in Passengers per Revenue Hour over FY`14 YTD.
 - ❖ Missed Trips were forty-two (42) compared to thirty-eight (38) in FY`14.
 - ❖ Set-backs were fifty-one (51) compared to twenty-four (24) in January FY`14 and eighty-one (81) Set-backs in December FY`15.
- Mr. O'Neil introduced Ms. Kusterski who gave a summary of the WRTA Data Slides Customer Service Report January 2015. The entire report can be viewed at the following link: [WRTA Data Slides Customer Service 2.19.15](#).
 - ❖ A total of 6,814 visits to the window which was down from 7,879 in FY`14.
 - ❖ Salesforce reports a total of 75 complaint cases and 67 of those were closed.
 - ❖ Case origination shows 83% percent by phone/voicemail, 9% percent WRTA website & 7% percent e-mail.
 - ❖ Outreach activities included three presentations at various senior centers and updated scheduled given to twenty-seven (27) businesses along the late night fixed routes.
- Mr. O'Neil informed the board members the pictures being taken today are for the purpose of accompanying an upcoming article in the Sunday's Telegram and Gazette. This article will be about the 42 Quinsigamond Ave project. Mr. O'Neil explained the article will slant towards the funding for acquisition and remediation as being corporate welfare. This despite the advantages of the site, its location, and the availability of state and federal funding for its clean-up. Mr. Belanger commented that the board members could reach out to Mr. O'Neil for any additional background information they may need. Mr. Belanger stated each board member should be prepared if they are questioned.
- Mr. O'Neil acknowledged the work done by Mr. Trabucco, Mr. Carney, and Mr. Parker in regards to Senator Rosenberg's legislative district initiative. The WRTA provided

buses and drivers for the purpose of having the senators out in their districts. Senator Chandler attended this initiative along with 25 other people.

5. Business from the Public

- Mr. Lehtola called for any business from the public and no one responded.

6. Business from the Board

- Mr. Lehtola apologized to the advisory board members present for his not calling for board members to speak at the last meeting. He noted Mr. Binnall called this matter to attention. He asked if Mr. Binnall had anything in particular he wanted to talk about. Mr. Binnall asked if the WRTA advisory board name could be changed to Board of Directors. Mr. Lehtola asked the administration what the state law says in this regard. Mr. O'Neil answered the board must be called an Advisory Board. Mr. Binnall replied he was not aware of that fact. Mr. Binnall asked if the advisory board meeting could be held at 8:00 AM. Board members discussed the time issue and consensus was the time should remain at 8:30 AM. This time best facilitates the schedules of the majority of members. Mr. Binnall inquired about his call back request through customer service. Mr. Carney explained the flexibility needed to have a van over a cab is company policy. Mr. Carney stated riders who need such information should contact van dispatch before pick-up time. The information will be provided with the understanding the vendor provider is subject to change.
- Mr. Ostrosky recommended an additional line should be added to the Kiosk scheduling displays. He explained the kiosk shows the buses up to thirty (30) minutes away, but not after thirty (30) minutes. He felt it would be beneficial to add this additional information (by route number only), as the GPS does not always work. This way he would know the GPS is working. Mr. Carney replied we can start to look at our policy downstairs. As of last year, we have started to announce when a bus is more than ten (10) minutes late. Mr. Lehtola stated we will see what options are available to address this.
- Mr. Lehtola read a response letter to Mr. O'Neil's reply, concerning the WRTA's use of the marquee wording such as "Go Patriots" and "Go Bruins." A summary of the letter has been provided and the entire letter can be viewed at the following link: [SG Exterior Bus Sign Letter 2.2015.pdf](#).
- The letter was from Stephen Gordon of Stephen Gordon & Associates, who was concerned with the choice of organizations being promoted on the WRTA buses. The writer objected to the WRTA using such space for what was termed "billion dollar entities." The letter explained how small businesses subsidizing the WRTA are not given free marquee space, while these sports teams are provided space without either payment or subsidizing the WRTA. The letter claims the objection is not whether it offends the public but whether everyone is treated equally.

- Mr. Belanger asked the administration if we threw off paying advertisers to put the wording in question on the bus marquees. Mr. O'Neil replied we did not. Mr. Belanger then asked is there any other hidden cost to the taxpayer in regards to putting this wording up on the marquee. Mr. O'Neil replied there is no hidden cost to the taxpayer. Mr. Belanger then spoke about the morale aspects of having the messages on the buses. In his opinion, it is sad that someone would try to make this an issue. He stated the administration was supported fully by the board in regards to the marquee ads. Mr. O'Neil then indicated we do this as community support and will continue to do so. No action was taken regarding this matter by the board.

7. Adjournment

- Mr. Lehtola asked for a motion to adjourn.
- **Motion: I move the board adjourn. Mr. Spain motion to adjourn and Mr. Belanger seconded.** All voted in favor and the motion to adjourn was accepted. The meeting adjourned at 10:09 a.m.

8. Next Meeting Date

- The next board meeting will be on March 19, 2015 at 8:30 a.m., located at the WRTA Hub 60 Foster Street, Worcester, MA 01608 3rd floor.