



Worcester Regional Transit Authority

Moving Our Region Forward

Union Station Hub 60 Foster Street Worcester, MA 01608

508.453.3403 Fax: 508.752.1676 [therta.com](http://therta.com)

## WRTA ADVISORY BOARD MEETING FEBRUARY 15, 2018 MINUTES

### WRTA ADVISORY BOARD MEETING

Chairperson Lehtola called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

### ATTENDANCE

Advisory Board Member present: Mark Binnall-Auburn, John Ostrosky – Shrewsbury, Judith O’Connor – Millbury, Jacob Sanders -Worcester, Brian Bullock – Holden, Barbara Connelly – Grafton, William Lehtola – Spencer.

### ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

Chairperson Lehtola asked for a motion to accept the minutes for January 18, 2018. On motion by Jacob Sanders, seconded by Mark Binnall (Brian Bullock abstained) the vote was carried and the Advisory Board accepted the minutes of January 18, 2018.

Chairperson Lehtola announced to the board members that Assistant General Manager Nicole Rohan has taken a position as General Manager at PVTA. The board acknowledged her work at the WRTA and thanked her for her service. “Our loss is their gain” stated Chairperson Lehtola.

### BUSINESS FROM THE BOARD

Mark Binnall commented on extending live operator phone coverage for the ADA operators. Mark Binnall asked if elimination of fixed route services outside of Worcester would affect ADA service outside of the City. Mr. Church responded that it would have an effect.

Bill Lehtola brought up the possibility of board members attending the meeting via remote participation. Due to time constraints, the suggestion was delayed until the March 15, 2018 board meeting. Chairperson Lehtola read a letter from absent board member Doug Belanger which gave a brief history of the board’s dedication to its ridership and supported the efforts of the WRTA Administrator.

Jacob Sanders made inquiries into having the Administration provide the board members with the specific costs associated with each Route option under review. Mr. Church explained that the total cost saving for all options would be about \$1.2 million. Mr. Church clarified that when the final state budget numbers are known, the Board will receive reports with specific breakdowns. Jacob Sanders spoke for the City Manager’s Office in regards to the WRTA’s pending budget shortfalls.

### ***Communities Served:***

Auburn	Brimfield	Douglas	Grafton	Millbury	North	Paxton	Southbridge	Wales	West Boylston
Barre	Brookfield	Dudley	Holden	New Braintree	Brookfield	Princeton	Spencer	Warren	West
Berlin	Charlton	East	Holland	Northborough	Oakham	Rutland	Sturbridge	Webster	Brookfield
Boylston	Clinton	Brookfield	Leicester	Northbridge	Oxford	Shrewsbury	Sutton	Westborough	Worcester

Their position was against reactionary cutting of services and raising fares. Emphasis was placed on finding the most feasible way to sustain the WRTA. Discussed where the problems created when actions promote a spiraling downward and how this should be avoided. The following was recommended: push for increased funding from the State; get a larger allotment of the RTA funds; review, revise and fine tune the WRTA service, in general.

John Ostrosky stated that nationally ridership is down and has been over the past two years.

## ADMINISTRATOR REPORT

### REPORTS

*a. WRTA Title VI Plan Submission to FTA Region I*

Mr. Fontanella, of CMRPC gave an updated presentation of the WRTA Title VI Plan compliance efforts. The WRTA is required to meet specific goals established under Title VI Program and those reviewed by the FTA and during Triennial reviews. Presentations are given to the board via policy of the program.

Chairperson Lehtola asked for a motion to approve the WRTA's FFY 2018 Title VI Report.

**Motion: I move that: The WRTA Advisory Board votes to approve the WRTA's FFY 2018 Title VI report in compliance with FTA Circular C4702.1B as presented to the board on February 15, 2018.**

On motion by Barbara Connelly, seconded by Mark Binnall, and carried unanimously, the Advisory Board voted to approve the FFY 2018 Title VI Report.

### FINANCE

*b. Preliminary FY 2019 WRTA Budget - Review and Discuss*

Mr. Coyne gave a brief presentation regarding the FY'19 Consolidated Budget Options. The presentation previewed possible increases/decreases to funding for the FY'19 budget. State funding for all RTA's at \$88.0 million (fully funded), \$82.4 million (shows a deficit of \$615,847 for the WRTA FY'19 budget) and at level funding \$80.4 million shows a deficit of \$897,327 for the WRTA FY'19 budget. It is not known at this time what figures will apply for budgeting purposes.

### OTHER

*c. Review and Discuss Potential Service Modification Scenarios based on Governor's FY'19 Budget*

Mr. Church gave an overview of the WRTA and listed the proposed cost saving service options and proposed service modifications (cost neutral). Mr. Church explained how the Governor's allocations have tended towards level funding the RTA's at \$80.4 million which would leave the WRTA with a \$900,000 dollar deficit in the FY'19 budget. Mr. Church described how the RTA's proposed a four year plan for state funding starting at \$80 million dollars (in FY'15) and increasing 2.5% every year for the set duration.

Therefore the RTA's planned their budgets under these numbers as a conservative measure to sustaining services and seeking moderate growth. Mr. Church indicated that the necessary increases have not been forthcoming from the state and the trend to level fund at \$80 million, which is the lowest (FY'15) level, has placed the WRTA in dire straits. The WRTA receives fourteen (14%) percent of the funds allocated to the RTA's and is the second largest RTA in Massachusetts.

Mr. Church stated that raising fares and a series of service reductions were already done for FY 2018 in regards to budgeting. The WRTA does not want to increase fares for FY 2019.

Mr. Church explained that the WRTA is not the only RTA to face the pains of underfunding by the state. Mr. Church outlined the State budgeting schedule as well as the necessary compliances for putting any cost saving service options into play.

The proposed cost savings service options were broken up by cost impact; low – under \$100K, Medium- \$100k-\$250K, and High-over \$250K in savings. Low impact options by route would be reduce service or eliminate Saturday service on specific routes. Medium impact options would be reducing service on specific routes, elimination of Sunday service, reduce Saturday services to a Sunday levels, and eliminate specific routes. High impact options would be the elimination of Routes 29, 33, and 42, eliminate both Saturday and Sunday services, and reduce trips on Routes 1,4,7, and 15.

The Potential Service Modifications options highlighted interline changes in Routes 3,30,6 and 27. Routes 14,24, or 30 could be re-routed to provide service to Main Street north of City Hall. Reductions to Route 19 Saturday to Worcester only, Interline for Route 3 and Route 14, Take Route 19 and 23 out of the Hub, end Route 14 at QCC. Listed are some of the potential options given by Mr. Church. Potential service options could be effective Saturday, June 23, 2018 or Saturday, August 25, 2018.

Mr. Church stated that the WRTA continues to have an open and productive dialog regarding the consequences surrounding this fiscal crisis. Mr. Church and Mr. Sanders acknowledged Senate President Harriette Chandler's support in regards to WRTA's budgeting needs. Mr. Church mentioned that he is working with officials from the City of Worcester.

The general timeline for State Budgeting is the end of April and the WRTA Board would be set to approve the FY'19 budget in June. What options would be chosen depends upon the final budget numbers, consideration of public feedback, and the Administration's recommendations to the board.

### BUSINESS FROM THE PUBLIC

The Chairperson person opened the floor for public comment. A summary of remarks has been compiled.

Councilor-at-Large Gary Rosen spoke about the importance of lobbying the House and Senate for more funding and a bigger share of the formula going to the WRTA. Mr. Rosen stated that Worcester benefits from a reliable and complete service. He added that many people are afraid of losing the buses. Councilor-at-Large Konstantina Lukes spoke about her history on the City Council and how the WRTA continually emphasizes cut services and raising fares. Ms. Lukes argued that the WRTA needs to adjust and address their system not just fund the same old system. Ms. Lukes suggested changing any State and Federal regulations that prohibit long term growth opportunities. District 4 Council Sarai Rivera emphasized the importance of having three core objectives; reliability, on-time schedules, and accessibility for all. Cutting back and higher fares for the purpose of maintaining the present system will not lead to sustainable service. Ms. Rivera offered her support regarding outreach to the districts. Mr. Tony Economou spoke about the importance of changing the RTA's formula and how continued struggling is not good for the system.

Members of the public voiced concerns over fixed route weekend cuts, community service cuts, and any ADA impact. Terry Kelly spoke about the possible use of President Trump's two billion dollar funding for Public Transportation. Ms. Kelly felt there was money in the system and the will to get it was needed. Ms. Kelly asked if WRTA drivers are part of the discussion when service changes occur. Mr. Church explained that a council of drivers and a union agent are part of the process.

The following is a list of suggestions given by members of the public:

- Off-peak fare pricing option
- Youth Fare for those up to 25 years of age
- Cleaner Buses
- Send proposed cuts schedule to the Governor
- Meet with Lt. Governor regarding the cuts in service due to their budget priorities
- Decrease the cost of riding the bus
- Develop new ridership
- Paint lines at the bus stop
- Work with WPD to ticket cars parked illegally at bus stops and take a percentage of the revenue
- Multiple Hubs
- Fill the vacant Rider Community Population board member

Suggestions for the use of private grants and support from colleges/business were addressed by Mr. Church. Colleges/businesses have been approached but they tend to support their own needs. Private grants are not a reliable source due to their specific goals and limited duration. A suggestion to save fuel by using vans on fixed routes was address. Mr. Church explained that fixed route passenger volume changes too much and regulations would not comply with van use.

Chairperson Lehtola asked for a motion to approve bringing service scenarios for public review and comment.

**Motion: I move that: The WRTA Advisory Board votes to approve bringing the service scenarios for public review and comment as presented to the board on February 15, 2018.**

On motion by Brian Bullock, seconded by Mark Binnall, and carried unanimously, the Advisory Board voted to approve bringing the service scenarios for public review and comment as presented to the board on February 15, 2018.

#### ADJOURNMENT

Chairperson Lehtola asked for a motion to adjourn. On motion by Barbara Connelly, seconded by Mark Binnall and carried unanimously, the Advisory Board meeting adjourned at 9:48 a.m.

#### NEXT MEETING DATE

The next WRTA Advisory Board Meeting will be on March 15, 2018 at 8:30 a.m., located at the hub 60 Foster Street, Worcester, MA 01608 3<sup>rd</sup> floor.