



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

WRTA ADVISORY BOARD MEETING JULY 26, 2018 MINUTES

WRTA ADVISORY BOARD MEETING

Chairperson Lehtola called the meeting to order at 8:38 a.m.

ATTENDANCE

Advisory Board Member present: Mark Binnall-Auburn, Kristen Las – Shrewsbury, Doug Belanger-Leicester, Brian Bullock – Holden, Barbara Connelly – Grafton, Robert Spain – Millbury, Jacob Sanders -Worcester, William Lehtola – Spencer. *Ron San Angelo – Southbridge entered the board meeting at 8:57 a.m.*

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

Chairperson Lehtola asked for a motion to accept the minutes for June 21, 2018. On motion by Doug Belanger, seconded by Mark Binnall the vote was carried unanimously the Advisory Board accepted the minutes of June 21, 2018.

Chairperson Lehtola opened the floor up for the public to speak.

BUSINESS FROM THE PUBLIC

Mr. Kevin Odom mentioned the importance of saving Route 25. Mr. Justin Lawson asks the board members to consider in their decisions the impact of losing drivers. Mr. Lawson spoke of the efforts made by their Driver’s Committee to lobby the statehouse to secure the needed funding. Mr. Lawson asked the board to reconsider the option to vote now and postpone until a later time. Mr. Lawson and others spoke of the benefits of signing an MOU with MassDOT to allow for the opportunity to participate in the additional monies as presented by the State Legislature. Others felt that cuts to management should occur versus cuts to drivers. Mr. Bruce commented on how making cuts is not the remedy for this situation. The general public input was against service cuts as the viable option. Board members discussed and clarified the uncertainty of fund designation and the additional requirements needed short and long term if an agreement is accepted.

Ms. Huntington asked for a weekend platform supervisor to be made available. Ms. Huntington agreed that no service cuts should be made and other options should be found. Mr. Thielker spoke about the importance of consistent service and commented on how not agreeing to the additional funds would leave money on the table. Mr. Thielker (member of the Ridership Advisory Council) commented on increasing ridership though a more expanded reduced fare program.

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

A commuter based fare option pricing was mentioned and the Board explained how the WRTA does not have high traffic value scheduling opportunities like other systems. This was due to the demographics of our ridership's income, the timing of peak ridership and the lack of the necessary critical mass. Board members also discussed the extremely low percentage of income generated by fare box revenue. Generally, ridership numbers may increase with reduced pricing but it has little value as an income stream for the necessary operational expenses (at 10% to 13% of the WRTA income). A paratransit rider commented on how MassDOT's funding levels do not reflect a clear understanding of the WRTA's ridership. Stressing how MassDOT should be meeting the people they are funding.

BUSINESS FROM THE BOARD

Chairperson Lehtola asked for any business from the board and no one replied.

Chairperson Lehtola thanked the departing Administrator, Jonathan E. Church for his service to the WRTA. Mr. Church stated he was hopeful to add more service but the budgeting did not allow for it. Mr. Church thanked the WRTA Board and the Union for working together.

ADMINISTRATOR REPORT

FINANCE

a. Update on approved FY'19 Conference Committee Budget

Mr. Church reported that the Conference Committee figure has been released and the Governor has until the end of the month to veto the budget. The whole budgeted figure for the RTA's is \$88 million however \$6 million is allotted as additional funds with specific criteria requirements. The base figure for the RTA's in FY'19 is \$82 million which would leave the WRTA with a revenue shortfall of \$446,011. If the WRTA were to get \$82 million we would be level serviced but not level funded. \$6 million in additionally allocated funding has been broken up into two (2) funding sources. The \$2 million is deficit driven and requires a signed MOU. The \$4 million is part of a competitive grant fund which is allocated by a task force (yet to be determined) and specifically used for enhancing ridership. This competitive grant fund requires no deficit on the part of the applying RTA's.

b. Presentation of public feedback received on proposed service changes

Mr. Church gave a brief overview of the public feedback received regarding the proposed service changes. Board member reviewed the data and commented on the importance of fiscal sustainability for the future of the WRTA while acknowledging the importance ridership places on service.

c. Review and discuss Administration's proposal based on public feedback and budget

Mr. Church presented two options for the Board's review and anticipated approval. Administration recommended these options based upon both public input and the necessary fiscal sustainability of the WRTA. The first option reviewed was the additional funding sources (2) and each had a separate set of criteria and funding amounts.

- The first discussed was the \$2 million dollars which required a Memorandum of Understanding outlining the responsibilities of the RTA participating. This was considered a remedial plan and based upon meeting specific performance measures and agreeing to mandatory fare increases, forming ridership partnerships with outside organizations, and submission of extensive reporting and reviews. Also, applying RTA's must have a deficit in their budget.
- The second discussed was the \$4 million additional (grant funded) which requires applying RTA's to have no deficit and is based on enhancing ridership measures. Mr. Church pointed out that the specifics of the grants requirements and necessary compliance measure are unknown as well as the schedule for funds being released. Board members expressed concern over the details, distribution and timing of the monies within the agreement.

Mr. Church stated that the WRTA has to cover its existing operational expenses and this lead to the second recommendation by the Administration.

- Mr. Church wrote a letter to Ms. Stephanie Pollack, Secretary of Transportation (MassDOT) for permission to release \$440,000 dollars from the WRTA's restricted funds. The letter was dated February 9, 2018 and no response has been issued as of this date. Administration will follow-up in this regard. The figure requested for release is about one half of the total funds within the WRTA's restricted account. The WRTA is required by law to request the release of this capped fund. Board members discussed the importance of having the State Legislative raise the cap going forward. Board members agreed that the use of restricted funds should be done with the greatest of caution.

Board Members Comments on the \$2 Million Additional Funding

Board members commented on the fact that the WRTA does not have a deficit but a revenue shortfall and this difference in wording may weigh on the choice of this option. Board members discussed the lack of funding and how it impacts the service and ridership. They commented on the due diligence performed by the WRTA to maintain a balanced budget overall. Board members agreed that the WRTA is at the point where service cuts and additional fare increases would cut into the long term viability of public transportation for the region. The WRTA already generates the necessary performance measures and has outreached to colleges and businesses for possible partnerships. Board members were concerned about the language in the MOU and proposed to submit an amended MOU to MassDOT before going with this option. Jacob Sanders commented on the importance of recognizing the additional funding and agreed with changes to the language in the MOU.

Mr. Parker acknowledged that the Union would be willing to push the effective date of the next bid back to September 22, 2018.

The board members acknowledged the following two options: Use of the reserve fund and to counter the existing MassDOT MOU with minor adjustments to make it workable for the WRTA.

Chairperson Lehtola asked for a motion to create a committee and authorize the committee to draft a revised MOU and to submit it to MassDOT.

Motion: the Advisory Board votes to create a committee and authorize the committee to draft a revised MOU and to submit it to MassDOT.

On motion by Doug Belanger, seconded by Ron San Angelo, the vote was carried unanimously the Advisory Board votes to create a committee and authorize the committee to draft a revised MOU and to submit it to MassDOT.

ACTION ITEM: Vote to approve proposed service changes

Chairperson Lehtola asked for approval to delay a vote on any service cuts at the July 26, 2018 board meeting to give time for Administration to make specific adjustments to the MOU.

Motion: The Advisory Board approves to delay a vote on any service cuts at the July 26, 2018 board meeting to give time for Administration make specific adjustments to the MOU.

On motion by Doug Belanger, seconded by Robert Spain, the vote was carried unanimously the Advisory Board approves to delay a vote on any service cuts at the July 26, 2018 board meeting to give time for Administration make specific adjustments to the MOU.

ADJOURNMENT

Chairperson Lehtola asked for a motion to adjourn. On motion by Mark Binnall, seconded by Barbara Connelly and carried unanimously, the Advisory Board meeting adjourned at 9:55 a.m.

NEXT MEETING DATE

The next WRTA Advisory Board Meeting will be on August 16, 2018 at 8:30 a.m., located at the Hub, 60 Foster Street, Worcester, MA 01608 3rd floor.